

Journal

PUBLICATION OF THE NATIONAL MUZZLE LOADING RIFLE ASSOCIATION'S BIG GAME RECORDS PROGRAM

World Record Muzzleloader Stone Sheep: Rick Carone's Yukon Hunt

by Dave Ehrig, NMLRA
Longhunter Society Chairman
photos by Ty Cary

Rick Carone is the new NMLRA Longhunter Society's Stone Sheep first place muzzleloading record holder. His story is both amazing and heartwarming. His story did not begin with a muzzleloader in his hands; it began with cancer. You see, this journey between his *Sheep Shape TV* friend, Chad Hall, and Rick, started with a single message, a single testimony: take what life deals and challenge it. There was a common bond between the two strangers: Chad, who is a cancer survivor, had overcome its cruel disability; and Rick who is currently fighting cancer for his life. Rick is continuing that challenge. This hunt was neither a coincidence nor a random meeting. They both believed that God was at work. And it is just the beginning!

Rick accepted Chad's invitation to be one of the four hunters on *Sheep Shape TV*. The journey started in May and would bring the men even closer. *Sheep Shape* is not just another hunting show on TV. It is Chad's vision, his dream, his passion. Each of the chosen hunters would hunt a different part of the country in search of the Dall, Fannin, or Stone Sheep Ram. However, the foundation needed to be set. Chad would rely heavily on his contacts both in the outdoor industry as well as his relationships forged while growing up in rural Michigan.

Chad pitched the show idea to childhood friend Jason Brown. Jason



Rick Carone is the new Longhunter Society, Stone Sheep #1 record holder.

is co-owner, producer, and editor for *Rusted Rooster Productions*, one of the most respected production companies in outdoor television. Chad immediately came up with a format that would become what the *Sheep Shape TV* show is today.

Each hunter would have a compelling story of overcoming adversity and heartache at some point in their lives. In Rick's case, he is currently battling stage IV pancreatic cancer. He is actively receiving chemotherapy every four weeks. During treatments he is

connected to tubes, wires and machines for three days. This brings on a whole mess of side effects: full body cramps, neuropathy, partial blindness, speech issues, diarrhea, and nausea. According to Rick, "I fight through it by looking forward to trips like this that help me to win the battle each month."

Rick knew that this sheep hunt would be very challenging. He would need to call upon a few friends for help, and need to be set up with some of the top thought leaders and coaches to get him in mental and physical shape. For this,

Many muzzleloading hunters dream of entering the NMLRA Longhunter Society's Big Game Record Book; some make it a lifelong quest. For some, it is just a fortunate turn of events; and for others, it just happens as one of life's unpredictable consequences of "being there."

he chose a good friend, Cameron Hanes. Cameron is the definition of hunter-athlete. He lives it every day and has been an inspiration to Rick in his fight. Cam and Rick started his training in his home town of Eugene, Oregon on Mount Pisgah. Cam knew that weight training was good and necessary for the Sheep Shape training, but just a small part of the winning formula.

The training on the mountain, the grueling uphill battles into higher altitude would be where our battles would be won. Cam is a master of mental warfare. He knew exactly what to do to overcome any obstacle. In a very short time he prepared Rick for the journey ahead.

Our first field trip together as a group would take us to Cody, Wyoming, the home to Gunwerks Custom Rifles. Gunwerks is owned by Aaron and Mike Davidson. The Sheep Shape team would be presented with a choice of rifles, as well as proper classroom and field training. While at their Wyoming shooting school, the hunters learned about mechanics, ballistics, minute of angle, windage, and altitude. They shot at random ranges in a mountain setting and believed in the gun and themselves when they left. Chad Hall, Patrick Scroggins, Kelsie Burford, and Rick



Rick chose the .50 caliber Gunwerks muzzleloader which was capable of taking sheep at ranges up to 500 yards.

were introduced to one another and made lasting bonds.

While Chad decided to go with a rifle chambered in 7mm, Patrick a 7mm, Kelsie a 6.5mm; Rick chose the .50 caliber muzzleloader. All of the gun packages were everything they were cracked up to be. Each felt confident enough to hit targets out to 1,000 yards with the rifles and just under 500 yards with the muzzleloader. We all named our rifles and had them engraved on the lower receiver plate. Rick's muzzleloader would be named

"Bobbie," for his mother who passed in 1998 from pancreatic cancer.

It took two days of traveling from home through Chicago, Vancouver, Whitehorse, and Dawson, to reach Hart Lake, the home of Midnight Sun Outfitting. Alan Young, daughter Jessie, and son Logan own and operate the lodge. Guide Jessie is also a registered nurse and was aware of Rick's condition. She was prepared to take Rick as a client and friend into Yukon Mountains. The Youngs do all of their hunts by horseback and river rafts. They know their land and animals and are prepared for whatever Mother Nature dishes out in their remote location.

Rick was greeted by guide Jessie Young, her brother Logan, and father Alan along with their team of cooks, wranglers, and other guides. They helped us unpack bags, and check out our firearms. In Rick's case it was a bow and muzzleloader. They made sure that the guns and bows were on target. Any hunter that travels knows the possibilities of problems due to the many legs of our trip in and out of airports and luggage handlers. "I first shot my Mathews Chill-R bow at the 100 yard target. My next shot was with my Gunwerks muzzleloader. It too was dead on at 100. I was ready," Rick observed.

Another bonus was that Rick's good friend Ty Cary would be the cameraman. Ty and Rick met the previous year while filming a piece in Oregon. Ty was more than a cameraman; he is an artist, a producer, and an editor; he has an eye for the story and isn't afraid to speak up when he has an idea. It was a great match.

The hunt for a Dall, now Stone Sheep, was a 10-hour horseback ride into the bush. The group of four with two extra pack horses made for quite a sight. Jessie, her wrangler/cook Kaylee, cam-

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eraman Ty and Rick were headed into adventure. Rick had his Badlands pack and bow and .50 caliber muzzleloader in its scabbard on his horse Rex.

The ride was breathtaking. Every stream, creek, and lake was spring fed. It was the coldest, cleanest, and most pure water he had ever drank. The hills and mountains were covered in blueberries, lichen, and hummocks. The leaves had just started to change and the temperatures were in the mid 50s F. It was perfect.

When they arrived at the base camp they had a stream 50 yards away; we were on high ground with large boulders surrounding the camp. Jessie reminded us that this was grizzly country and should be aware of our surroundings at all times. Kaylee set up camp and stove, and we unpacked the horses. Ty and I set up our tents, bags, and sleeping pads. This was Rick's first time camping in the wilderness, out of touch with civilization and sleeping under the stars.

The next two days the hunters would be socked in by bad weather. Rain and fog prevented them from glassing the area and visibility was limited to 30 yards. While they did get out a few hours each day, it was strictly around camp.

The third day they were finally able to hunt. Setting out on horseback, they got to an area high enough to glass a few mountain tops. Several lambs, ewes, and young rams were beautiful white against dull gray mountain slopes. Their bright white silhouettes were easy to spot as they fed on the sparse vegetation. Now they just needed to spot a legal ram.

Day four, the team woke up early and headed out to the base of a mountain



Cameraman Ty Cary

that Jessie knew well. They climbed off the horses and started to climb a mountain that Jessie said would take four hours. Halfway up, the guide spotted sheep; a group of 8 lambs and ewes. Jessie said that the group needed to turn around and not bump the sheep or this action would clear out the mountain top. As they started to head down, Jessie wanted to head down and go to the right, but Rick had an instinctive hunch to go left. Fortunately, Jessie agreed. She stated that if we didn't spot anything, they would hit the other side of the mountain the next day.

After another two hour climb, Jessie asked for the Meopta spotting scope. She settled in on a single white spot about 2,000 feet above us. We sat down, took off our packs and drank some cool clear Yukon water. Jessie looked back to Rick with a smile and told him to take a look in the scope. "My heart stopped as I looked in the scope," Rick stated. "He was beautiful. I was finally looking at a shooter ram."

Jessie said he was a good ram and we started to formulate a plan to get a closer look. We started back up the mountain with a huge cube shaped boulder

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der between us and the ram. He looked to be alone, but Jessie wasn't sure. Usually the rams are in groups called "bands." While it wasn't uncommon to see solo rams, she wasn't sure. It took an hour to climb to the base of the huge boulder which was in a saddle containing a green pasture. Jessie went to the left side of the boulder to glass. Rick watched Jessie as she lifted her binoculars, stopped and then the rangefinder. Rick didn't understand the hesitation and gestured "What?"

Jessie turned and said, "Your ram is at 8 yards!"

"My heart was in my throat as I quietly unstrapped my bow from the back pack," Rick remembers. Jessie motioned that the big ram was slowly feeding to the right. "With Jessie on my left and Ty on my right, all I needed was to sneak to the right about two yards and draw back. It seemed simple, right?" Rick continued. "Prior to doing as told, I peeked around the left side of the boulder only to be looking eye to eye with the ram. I quickly swung my head back and pretended like he didn't see me. We sneaked around his right side only to see him walking off at a steady pace straight away from us!"

Jessie immediately told Rick to drop the bow and grab the muzzleloader. As Rick quickly dropped the bow and grabbed a 209 primer from his pocket and closed the bolt readying the Gunwerks .50, he settled into prone position.

Jessie stopped the ram with a few bleats as Rick acquired the ram in his



The huge Stone Sheep ram was lying dead. His Gunwerks muzzleloader had hit the spot right behind the shoulder!

scope. Asking Jessie for a range, she stated "220 yards." He dialed in his Nightforce scope and settled his breathing before he squeezed off the shot.

"The shot felt good – really good," Rick remembered. "But, as the smoke cleared, I realized that the ram was walking away like he hadn't even been hit."

Jessie urged him to quickly reload. Rushing through the memory of pouring 95 gr. of Blackhorn 209 powder, seating the wad, and seating a 325 gr. MML-sabotted bullet, Rick rammed it down and cleared the old primer. Rick then set the new primer inside the breech and closed the bolt. He settled in only to see his ram crest the hill. He was gone! Devastated, Rick exclaimed, "I missed; I blew my shot!"

Jessie immediately started to pack up quickly and said "Let's get on him."

Rick noted that he was running on fumes, but had to find a way to push on. The team was back to climbing. They had an 800 yard climb, straight up loose shale and boulders ahead of them. Adrenaline was getting the best of Rick.

They made the climb and came to another small shelf. As the team crested the peak and looked over the other side, Rick was thunderstruck! The huge Stone Sheep ram was lying there dead. His Gunwerks muzzleloader had hit the spot right behind the shoulder!

"I killed a beautiful ram with 'Bobbie,' the gun named after my Mom and to top it off, it was also my late Dad's birthday. Emotions were flowing! Ty

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Jessie and Ty were in awe of the shot at the grizzly, at 294 yards with a muzzleloader! But that is exactly what Gunwerks prides themselves on: "One shot, one kill."

had captured it all on film and Jessie and I were crying in each other's arms! This was exactly what Sheep Shape TV is all about. All the hard work, the blood, sweat, and tears had paid off," Rick testified emotionally.

Once the team calmed down, Jessie looked at Rick and asked, "Do you realize what you have just done?"

Rick told her that he was so thankful and proud of the whole team. Then, Jessie told me again to "Look at your ram!"

Rick knew that the ram was a good representative ram, but didn't realize that it was an even bigger trophy than what he had thought. Jessie told him that most sheep hunters go a lifetime without killing a ram of this caliber. To put it in perspective, Jessie said he had killed the equivalent of a 200-inch

whitetail deer! Rick was speechless. To this Midwestern boy, the enormity of this Stone Sheep was overwhelming!

In the days following the kill, the team took it easy. Rick's body had absorbed quite a bit of physical punishment and the next couple days he cramped up and was having abdomen and chest pains. The combination of adrenaline, the physical stress of walking up and down the mountains, as well as the overwhelming emotions from a successful hunt, were punishing his impaired body. While the team glassed a few mountains closer to camp for caribou and grizzly, there were few sightings and it looked like the hunt was over.

The final morning, we packed up the horses and started on the 10-hour ride back to base camp. About seven hours into our ride we stopped to fill up with

water and relieve our bladders. That's when Kaylee went off into the bush and suddenly called Jessie over to her location. She had spotted a grizzly! Jessie came back and asked Rick if he wanted to give it a stalk. He took his bow and the muzzleloader hoping that he would get close enough for a shot with his bow. The wind was calm and it seemed like the perfect scenario.

Slowly Rick made his way to the top of a small knoll and saw him, a beautiful silver-tipped grizzly. The sun was reflecting off the hump on its back and excitement ruled the air. When the team got to within 300 yards, the grizzly was beginning to actively sniff the air. The wind was calm but very inconsistent. Jessie said it was now or never, because the bear was acting skittish. Rick dropped down to prone position and Jessie ranged the bear at 294 yards. As the crosshairs settled in, Rick held a breath and squeezed off a shot.

Immediately, there was a thunderous "thwack" from the 325 gr. Parker bullet. After the smoke cleared, they saw the bear rolling down the hill. Jessie and Ty were in awe of the shot – 294 yards with a muzzleloader! But that is exactly what Gunwerks prides itself on: "One shot, one kill."

Rick Carone had a second muzzleloading kill for the week. The team made quick work of dressing the grizzly, and taking photos. Ty filmed our interviews and Rick thanked Kaylee with a big hug for spotting the grizzly. We had done it again! Team Arc Outdoors was on cloud nine. Not only was the team going back to camp with

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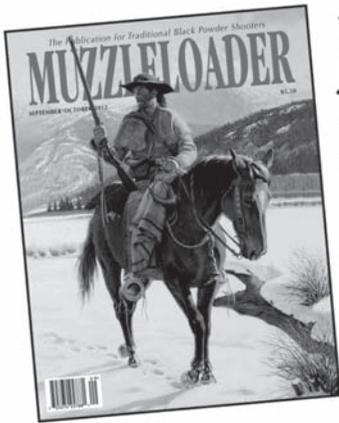
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Boone and Crockett official measurer, Clint Walker reported that Rick Carone's Stone Sheep Ram has been measured at 169 1/8 gross score, and 168 5/8 net inches after deductions, making it the "Number 1 All Time Muzzleloader Stone Sheep Kill."

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a monstrous ram, but also with a mature silver-tipped grizzly.

The next morning they packed up the gear and loaded the plane. The quest was over. Season one of *Sheep Shape TV* had come to a close. The hunt could not have been scripted any better. Rick sadly said his goodbyes to the Youngs and the Yukon Territory. God willing, he would be back.

Rick wanted this story written quickly for he knew that his time was limited. He wrote, "This was more than a hunt for me, more than a television show. It was a spiritual journey. I am a firm believer that God put me here for a bigger purpose. My prayers are that this story will inspire you and have you looking into why you are here and what your purpose on earth is."

Update: 10/17/2014

Rick received a call from the Boone and Crockett official measurer, Clint Walker. His Stone Sheep Ram was measured at 169 1/8 gross score, and 168 5/8 net inches after deductions, making it the Number One All Time Muzzleloader Stone Sheep kill. It will be full body mounted by Dustin Clark of Oregon and featured at the next Wild Sheep Foundation Sheep Show in Reno, Nevada, January 7-10. It was also recently scored by SCI/Safari Club International and earned "The All Time World Record Stone Sheep taken by Muzzleloader" at 169 1/8.

Rick commented, "When I first laid eyes on this ram, I knew it was a good representative ram for the area. But, I had no idea it was a trophy of this caliber. Once again, I am blessed and my hope is that this will allow me to share my story of inspiration with all."



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