**Connecting with nature through hunting**

In the fall of 2014, one year after traveling to Canada for the first time, I got the opportunity to join several hunting trips in the Mountains.

Previous to this I had left my home in Sweden and spent 8 months, divided in two separate periods, gaining experiences within many different areas, with the goal of being able to run my own guiding business in the future.

Horses, guiding and being in the mountains was something that interested me before entering Canada, but hunting was never a part of my life before leaving Sweden. As I got more knowledge about the hunting lifestyle, as well as the important role hunting has for conservation work, the wish to join hunting trips grew stronger.

I spent a lot of my own time at the ranch studing for the PAL exam, took all the chances I got to go out tracking and scouting, and got a lot of hands on experience skinning together with the hunting guides as they came back from successfull hunts.

So after a busy summer guiding groups on pack trips as well as assisting guide schools, it was decided I would get to go out guiding hunting trips with clients and I received my assistant guide license. I was really proud and excited!

I got to go into the mountains more times than I would have imagined that fall, but the absolutely most memorable trips, and the toughest, was the Mountain goat hunt.

Together with a very experienced hunting guide and taxidermist, Jeff, I was heading out to the mountains with a client named John from Michigan, to fulfill a long dream of his to shoot a Mountain goat.

We left the ranch by truck and got dropped off at the trail head with our three horses, surrounded by tough-looking, rocky mountains perfect for Mountain goats. By horseback we headed further into the guiding area, and stopped when we found ourselves a good camping spot.

At that point nightfall was closing in and we staked the horses, put the tents up and got the fire going to get some dinner, before crawling into our sleeping bags to get ready for some climbing the following day.

I had a great time being out with Jeff and John, both easy-going and knowledgable guys with a positive attitude, and I remember well how confident Jeff was that we would find a nice billy, which made John and myself excited and confident as well.

So we spent our days searching, often starting with glassing the mountain sides as we had breakfast around the fire, and then heading out by foot towards the most interesting white dots we had spotted through our binoculars. I had learnt how difficult it is to tell billy goats from nannys, and even though I knew what signs to look for (like the size of the horn base and the curve of the horns) I had a hard time believing we would ever get close enough to be able to make the call.

Every day was different, and one day coming down from a mountain we did some memorable hiking through a seemingly endless area of brushwood, which took much longer than what we estimated looking at it from above, and left us with a lot of scratches.

We also realized our camp spot couldn't be far away from where a Grizzly bear and her cubs were living, as we found fresh bear scat in different sizes going in and out of camp most days. Luckily we never saw any bears, and our food supply at camp got left alone as well – from bears at least! One day we came back to find one of the horses loose, happily eating apples from our supply..!

As the days passed all three of us started to get a bit anxious, with the last day of the hunt getting closer and no chance to shoot jet. Even though we always spotted goats when glassing in the mornings, they outsmarted us as we climbed up and we didn't seem to be able to ever get close enough.

In the evening the last day we desperately moved camp back to where the trailhead started. We decided we didn't want to give up without really giving it all we had, so by moving camp to the pick up spot we would be able get a few bonus hours in the morning to spend hunting. We called up the ranch and made a deal that they would pick us up in the afternoon the next day, allowing us to do one last climb up the mountain.

And sometimes you need to go out that last morning to get the game you're looking for – which we were lucky to experience that day! We where able to get close enough to a nice billy, standing in a good position that wouldn't send him down the mountain side when falling. John fired a couple of well placed shots and we all cheered of happiness! Finally.

We gutted and skinned out the goat quickly and we rolled up the skin and packed it up together with the meat. As we were running out of time, we decided I would take the backpack with the goat and head down to camp ahead of the others to meet up the driver. I was full of energy from all the excitement and half ran, half walked down the mountain side, while Jeff and John went a little bit slower.

I timed it perfectly, coming out on the road just as the truck and trailer pulled up. We packed the supplies, loaded the horses and were ready to go when Jeff and John joined us, happy and exhausted.

We arrived back at the ranch safe and sound, a bit later than planned but very pleased with the week. And after taking care of the horses and gear me and Jeff joined John for an amazing dinner in the ranch house. Despite being exhausted and very sore from a week of hiking steep terrain I couldn't be happier, and excited to go out again in a few days!

Hunting is such an outstanding activity when you love being outdoors and connect with nature. To be a good hunter you need a deep understanding of nature and of animals, or you'll never be successful. I am truly happy for the intruduction to hunting that I got, an interest that lives on today, probably stronger than ever.

*Ella*

*Sweden*