

My First Time Hunt Guiding

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I didn't grow up in a family of hunters or outdoorsmen. We never went camping, fishing, or hunting. But after arriving at the ranch, in the wilds of British Columbia, I was introduced to an entirely new world that I never knew existed. And from day one I was hooked!

What I love most about hunting is that it forces you to slow down and take in your surroundings: to watch, listen, and become more in tune with nature. Hunting, unlike farming, sets a human in direct competition against the will of nature; against animals far more adapted to surviving in the wild. Ultimately, it's about the adventure of being in the center of nature and wildlife

Determined to be part of this world, I took every opportunity that would enable me to be involved in the fall hunt season. This included taking part in the Guide School program and getting my Assistant Hunt Guide License. Almost immediately after completing these courses, the ranch offered me the chance to be an assistant hunt guide on a week's mule deer hunt by horseback—an experience that sparked my passion for hunting.

I knew that this scheduled seven-day hunt in the mountains would be challenging, and for myself especially, as I was guiding in a range that I had not visited before. Furthermore, as every hunt is different, none of us could predict how we would relate to the many hours on horseback, the long days and late nights – and of course, the unpredictable weather.

Our original plan, laid out before we left, was to ride out to B and F camp, and spend the week glassing 'Big Buck Basin' and the area that surrounds it. However, unexpected early snows threw us a curve ball; disrupting the deer migration and pushing them down the



Riding from B and F camp to Eldorado

mountains early. As such, for three days, we saw nothing. Therefore, on day four, the decision was made to pack up camp and ride over the pass into Eldorado basin to try our luck there.

I was quick to learn that hunting by horseback is a very unique experience. Unlike a typical horse trek, there are no distinct trails to follow: you go where the wildlife goes. This can include narrow mountain passes, thick brush and steep ridge edges. From the start this proved to be a testing challenge. I was put in charge to lead the group of hunters which, in snowy conditions and in a range that I had not ridden in before, required a new level of focus to ensure that I chose the safest route possible. Despite my initial nerves, leading the hunt was a huge turning point for me. I had my hunters, two officers from the US Special Forces, completely trusting my decisions and following my instructions without question. In their eyes, they saw me as a leader, not as a shy, awkward student that I saw myself as. This was a hugely empowering moment, and greatly increased my confidence in my own leadership abilities.

After safely arriving at Eldorado camp, the decision was made to split into two groups, and head into two different mountain passes. I was to take my two hunters up to Windy Pass and glass down into the valley opposite. This was a big step up for me. I was now the solo guide, and entirely responsible for my two hunters.

The trip started off smoothly, and we made good time riding up to our glassing point. However, soon after we arrived, a sudden change of weather caught us off guard. Thick clouds came rolling in, and before we knew it, we were stuck amongst heavy snow-fall. We made the quick decision to pack up and head back down the mountain to camp. However, by this point the snow had really picked up, and it was difficult to see even a few metres in-front of us. Luckily, the ridges that surround Windy Pass are made up of soft, sandy shale, which left a distinct trail of hoof prints from our ride up. Visibility became so poor so quickly, that these tracks proved vital to get us back on the trail home.



Back on the trail: riding from Windy Pass down to Eldorado camp

We all made it home safely, and despite not seeing any deer, this hunt was a huge personal success. Not only had my self-confidence increased, but my self-image had changed. Because the hunters saw me, not as an inexperienced female intern, but as a respected guide, I began to see myself in the same way. Whilst I still have a long way to go gaining relevant knowledge and experience, I have proven to myself that I can be a leader in this

tough, unpredictable environment.