

“X” MARKS THE SPOT

Well you didn't really think I was going to put an “X” on the map for you, did you ? I do have a few of my own X's, but believe me, it will be far more of a rewarding and enjoyable experience, if you piece the puzzle together on your own. I must admit, I am a bit of a map and research junky when it comes to potential sheep habitat, so planning and research are half the fun for me. As in my previous articles, my suggestions are more directed toward the new sheep hunter, who may be needing a little help deciding on where to wear out his boot leather.



SHEEP DOG

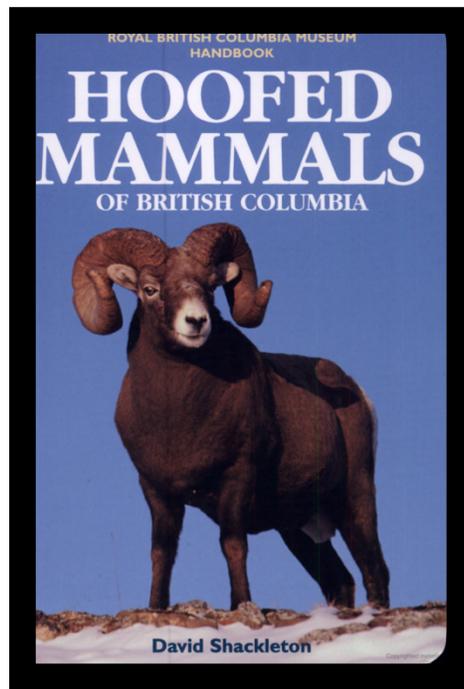
Thin horns are my passion. Therefore, I will be focusing on Region 6 & 7. I would suggest starting your research with broad strokes. You will need to decide on region, then sub-region, watershed, and so on. Let us start by contrasting region 6 and 7. I have hunted both many times and can't recommend against a trip in either. Region 7 has a larger population and density of sheep than region 6, however region 6 receives less hunter pressure. Region 6 generally experiences more rain, wind and cloud, at time it feels biblical in intensity. This inclement weather not only is uncomfortable, but could potentially obscure the mountains and sheep for days at a time. Due to the propensity for worse weather in region 6, I would limit my sheep hunts to August or early September. Keep in mind that region 6 is massive and the further West you travel, the worse the weather will be on average. In my experience, the exception to this rule is the furthest East portion of region 6 (last 50km, or so). As you travel this last 50km Eastward, towards the Ketchikan river, the trend will be towards drier and clearer conditions, almost equivalent to region 7.

Both regions afford the ability to hike in off the highway. Region 7 has more trail heads and ease of access into the alpine, which will attract more foot traffic. Region 6 will often require a significant effort to bushwhack up and through the alder and devil's club, just to get to the alpine from the highway. This effort will thin out a large percentage of the hunter herd, because quite frankly, many hunters just don't want to put in that intense of an effort. There are some trails in region 6, just not well know of. Good research and networking will reveal the location of the trail heads.

If you have elected to fly-in, you will need to confirm with your charter pilot, that they will fly you into your chosen lake. There are a number of lakes that your pilot won't fly you into, this is because of

agreements between the charter operator and the outfitter.

OK, now that you have your region locked in, what next? Research, research, and more research. The tools available to mark your own personal "X" on a map are more than abundant and a few old timers would consider these tools to be cheating and taking a short cut to success. I am of the opinion that one of the greatest hurdles to committing to your first sheep hunt is lack of knowledge, the where, when, and the hows to put it simply. If the resources of the internet can encourage more hunters onto the mountains, I am all for it. More sheep hunters equals more advocates for sheep and sheep mountains. Remember strength in numbers.



GREAT DISTRIBUTION MAPS

Now let us begin to narrow the search. A good resource to familiarize yourself with sheep densities is a book by David Shackleton, called "Hoofed mammals of British Columbia". Inside you will find a distribution and

density map of sheep in B.C. Take a copy of this map and enlarge it, then hand transpose the boundaries to your recreational atlas of BC or another map. If there is an open season in the regs and the book indicates a population of sheep exists, well now all you have to do is strap on your boots and go exploring! The website and forum 'huntingbc.ca' is an excellent source of mostly true and current info. You can use the search forum to find the threads regarding sheep hunting. A weekend full of reading will be available, including many popular hunting locations. Additionally, explore the internet. Use search engine inputs such as, sheep inventory, sheep census, wildlife inventory, stone sheep, you get the picture. I enjoy reading present day and historical stories on sheep hunting and management, and then try to sleuth together where the location of the event occurred. Google earth is your friend. I have many times found old photos on the internet, and then within a few hours of flying around on Google earth, managed to locate the picture location to within meters.

A couple of my favorite authors on the subject of sheep hunting are: Duncan Gilchrist and Tony Russ. If you read some of their books in conjunction with information available on huntingbc.ca, you will begin to form a picture of where to begin to look for sheep on the mountain. Once you are familiar with what sheep habitat may look like, you can transfer your search over to maps and the internet. I use both Google Earth and Bing maps. Google Earth's strengths are the ability to manipulate your perspective and get an overall feel of the terrain's grade and your resultant ability to traverse it. Bing maps does not possess this feature, thus allowing only a 2D map view. Bing maps best feature is it's resolution, at times you will be able to not only see major trails but sheep trails on top of the mountain as well. Google Earth is catching up in resolution, but is still far behind Bing maps in the North of B.C.

THE DALL SHEEP HUNTER'S GUIDE

SHEEP HUNTING IN ALASKA

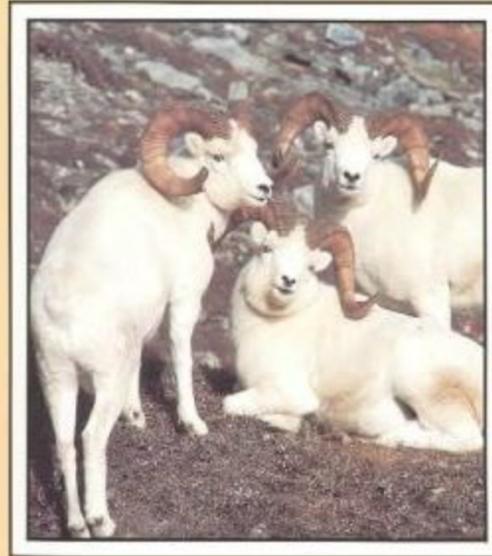


Tony Russ

2nd Edition
Completely Revised

QUEST FOR DALL RAMS

Duncan Gilchrist



Grab a beer and enjoy, you will be a sheep hunter when you finish reading ☺

No excuses after reading this !

Between these two map engines, you will have an excellent idea of the terrain and it's ruggedness before you even step off the floatplane.

The most powerful tool to finding the "X" that marks the hanging valley full of 40" plus sheep, is networking. If you come to the annual convention of the WSSBC, the place will be absolutely full with very experienced sheep hunters, who are generally very tight lipped with information. Having said that, I know that myself and others are more likely to share information with someone who has shown a commitment to wild sheep and a desire to help promote their future. By joining the WSSBC, and coming to the convention, you ARE

showing a commitment and you will be making a difference. Who knows, you may be lucky and find the next hardest thing after a 40" ram, that is a compatible sheep hunting partner. I know I constantly build up my hunting partner's ego by telling him how good looking, strong, and smart he is, in addition to supplying an endless stream of café americanos ☺ Just to ensure he doesn't find a younger and stronger partner to carry his pack up the mountain.

Happy trails,

Mike Kirk