

TILL DEATH DO US PART

I would never admit that finding a compatible sheep hunting partner is harder than finding a compatible spouse, but from my casual observations it must be close, for many hunters search for years to find a committed hunting partner and may never succeed. I found mine at 40, and yet, I found my wife at 25, at a hot tub party. I won't contrast the two relationships, but I will say my sheep hunting partner has led me to a lot more physical and mental misery, and yet I keep coming back for more.

What this article is about, is how to be a good hunting partner and not be dumped for another partner with better looking gear or a less whiny gearbox.

I've heard that couples spend more time planning their vacation, than they do planning their respective marriage expectations. I know that would probably be true in my marriage. Any



relationship, from marriage to a long term sheep hunting partnership can fail, because of a lack of commitment and/or communication of expectations. In the following paragraphs, I'll endeavor to highlight some issues I or friends have experienced.

TRAINING TO BE SHEEP SHAPE. This is probably the most common complaint I have heard over the years. Often only half of the hunter partnership shows up in August, having killed him or herself for the last half a year training, and ready to hoist that 80lb pack and attack the mountains for two weeks. Sadly, the other partner is often underprepared and has trained very little, if at all. I have personally had a hunt go sideways after the first few hours, of the first day, due to this very reason. So how does one prepare for this possibility? You can't control other people's actions or more importantly their in-actions, but I would suggest to stay in contact in the pre-season, and query your partner as to how their training is evolving. In addition, I would suggest talking about how the hunt will proceed, if one partner is falling short of physical expectations. I won't suggest that two individuals of vastly divergent physical capabilities shouldn't

hunt together, or they won't have an amazing time together, but I am saying they should have a coffee or two and discuss the needs of both individuals.

DON'T BE A FLAKE. Be honest with your partner. If there is a possibility you won't be able to make the hunt, tell him/her you aren't 100% committed, as of yet. Many people make a hunt commitment over a beer or two, without having the time or financial resources to follow through. By not communicating your inability to make the hunt, you are doing a disservice to your friend and hunting partner. He will continue to make plans, incur costs, take time off work all the while becoming more emotionally invested in this quite possibly, trip of a lifetime. Of course, life happens sometimes and you have no choice but to cancel a trip, but regardless of the reason for bowing out, communicate your intentions ASAP and be very clear, because friendships can become extremely strained if intentions aren't articulated until the last minute.

EXPENSES. Be up front about all expenses and be realistic. Newbies will only have a vague notion of all the expenses required, especially for a fly-in trip. Sit down with your partner and go over every possible expense, how the costs will be split and the time frame for settling up. It will be helpful to think of what if scenarios as well, for example, You placed a non refundable deposit on a fly-in trip and at the last minute, your partner cancels the trip, will you split the loss, or should the individual who canceled at the last moment, shoulder the entire financial loss?

Another example, Three sheep hunting partners fly into a location, after a couple of days, one hunter decides he is not cut out for the mountains, and radios the float operator for an earlier additional pickup. He will obviously shoulder the cost of the extra flight, but should he also pay for a third of the original flight he had committed to? Remembering that for some, the cost of these fly-in trips are very burdensome and they are banking on the fact that the flight will be split 3 ways. Or who will pay for the ferry? If one partner is leaving the Island and picking up a partner in the LML with the Islander's vehicle. Without talking about these variable costs before you start your drive North, you run the risk of a ruined friendship, over a misunderstanding over who pays for what.

BE THE HIRED HELP. Remember sheep hunters are an odd lot, and they often view their annual trip akin to a spiritual experience crossed with a navy seal physical exam, and as such, they take their sheep hunting very seriously. If someone has invited you along, do your best to get invited again, as there are no

shortages of wannabe replacements in the dugouts. Following is a list that I would consider all newbies take under consideration.



CODE OF CONDUCT

- 1. As mentioned in an earlier paragraph, be in sheep shape.**
- 2. Buy the proper gear, if you can't buy new, buy used or borrow.**
- 3. Carry your weight, don't expect your partner to carry your share because you have packed too much, or aren't conditioned well enough. Caveat - unless your married to your partner :)**
- 4. When on the mountain, don't be lazy and expect your partner to pickup your slack.**
- 5. Be the first to wake up and make the coffee.**
- 6. Be the one that checks the guidelines in the middle of a storm at night.**
- 7. Be the one that offers to descend a few thousand feet to replenish your water.**
- 8. Be the one that breaks trail and gets that little bit extra wet in the morning.**
- 9. Be the one that offers to climb the last few hundred feet, to look over the top.**
- 10. Make sure you pay your share of all expenses and a tiny bit more.**

- 11. Pack only what the experienced sheep hunter tells you to.**
- 12. Be the one that drives more than 50% of the time**
- 13. Shoot your rifle a lot and be able to humanely shoot an animal at a few hundred yards.**
- 14. And most importantly, be the one that allows this author to shoot the first giant twister.**
- 15. Kidding aside, be the guy with the positive outlook and just do your best. I would rather have an absolute neophyte with a great attitude along, than a well-seasoned sheep hunter who mopes around like Eyore.**

The above list is obviously not exhaustive, but is a good start and with common sense and respect, well-adjusted individuals can figure out the rest.

**Happy Trails,
Mike Kirk**