

*West Texas Free Range Barbary Sheep Hunt*  
*November 12, 13, 14, 2010*  
*with Jim Roche - Magnum Guide Service by George K. Hill*

I had worked most of the week in Austin, and the conference was finally drawing to a close. At 4 o'clock that Thursday afternoon, I headed back to Boerne to pack up my gear for a 3 day sheep hunt with Jim out in West Texas. By 6:30 I was on my way to El Dorado to overnight at the Magnum Lodge before we headed out to Marfa. I pulled into the lodge at 9 o'clock that evening and was welcomed with a hot meal and the tale of a young hunter who had taken his first buck that evening, a 155 inch 8 point. Wow! I hunted South Texas for nearly 50 years before I shot one over 150 inches. That night I didn't sleep much and remembered when I was a kid hunting with my Dad. I would look at the clock every 15 minutes until the 4:30 alarm rang. I had that same excitement and could not wait to climb those West Texas mountains and glass for sheep.

Jim brought along another guide named Craig, and when we arrived at the ranch, Craig quickly unloaded our gear, packed the 6-wheeler, and we set off for a Chinati peak. Most of the first afternoon was spent observing many different herds of sheep and different bachelor packs. At night fall we headed back to the lodge for a hearty dinner. There was a weak cold front that passed through that evening, and as the stars came out, I realized my head was filled with snapshots of all the rams we had seen that afternoon. They were running through my mind like they were on video, playing over and over and over. They say that part of Texas is the darkest spot in the continental United States, and as I turned off the bedside lamp, I believed it.

I awoke the next morning at 7:30 with Jim knocking on my door saying, "Come on sunshine do you want to hunt or sleep all day?" For some reason, I slept so soundly; maybe it was because it was so dark and quiet or perhaps it was because there was no blackberry service; either way, I was well rested and ready. We jumped in the 6-wheeler and headed off. We wandered down the dusty roads and trails noting several good rams, when we ground to a halt. Jim said, "There's sheep feeding down that ridge." Where? I said. "See the three bushes just to the left of the ridge; go down about 25 yards, should be at your 9:00. "Where?" I asked. After a few more directions and instructions on a clock's face, I said, "Oh yeah, I've got them." Jim whispered, "That one ram's a shooter, get your rifle and let's go." We set up on a vantage point, and I got a good look at him



through my scope. This was a good ram, exactly what I was looking for. Jim coached me through a long shot; the ram fell and tumbled to a stop just above a fairly steep ravine. Craig and I set off down the side of the peak, across the ravine and up the adjoining peak to locate the ram while Jim kept an eye on him through the spotting scope. After a few instructions via the radio, we located him, and he was everything I came for. It was then I decided I might want to find another trophy ram if we could. After all, I had a trophy, and I was sure my wife would like me to shoot one for her too! It would make a perfect Christmas present, I thought.

We enjoyed a tasty field lunch looking over the plains of Old Mexico. The Chinati Mountain Range includes the 4<sup>th</sup> tallest mountain in Texas, at 7,700 feet, a magnificent sign of God's creation. That afternoon we spent several hours looking at all types of wildlife through our binoculars. As it started getting later in the afternoon, I was beginning to think my wife may not get the present I knew she would love.

We pulled through a dry creek bed, and as we came out on top, we saw a group of sheep running up the mountain side. Jim said there were 2 shooters in that bunch. By the time we got into a shooting position, they were well out of range---well, my range anyway. We loaded up and drove the rocky road around the base of the mountain. I thought to myself, "Well there goes Lisa's present." As we rounded the mountain, the sheep were running down the other side, and Jim said, "Now's your chance!" We jumped out, got set up just as they disappeared into a deep chasm. "Well," I thought, "there goes Lisa's present again!" You never know about sheep. It seems they always need a Shepherd – just like we do. Without Jesus Christ as my Shepherd, I would be lost, running up one side of life's mountain and down the other, always moving but never making a difference in this life.

Just as suddenly as they disappeared, they reappeared again running up the ridge directly in front of us. Jim whispered, "He's the third one, 220 yards, take your shot." I pulled the trigger and shot just over his back as a rock exploded from the 180 grain Barnes bullet. "Reload!" Jim said, "he's at 249; take your shot now!" I was on him and squeezed the trigger but could not tell if the shot was true. As I looked at him through the scope; the other sheep were climbing up past him, and as he slowed, he fell. Jim said, "Good shot. Get your packs, your headlights and some water, don't take anything you won't need this will be a difficult recovery." As the sun faded, we started down into the chasm and up the other side. My legs turned to jello, and my lungs burned for oxygen. When Craig and I climbed to where the ram fell, he was not there. The mountain side looked eerily different in the dark. We continued to look, and I could hear Jim talking to Craig on the



radio. I looked down the side of the mountain and there was Jim. How did he get over here so quickly? He was down about 30 yards below us in high grass and said, "Here he is!" He must have rolled down after he fell---another absolutely perfect trophy. We snapped some night time pictures, caped him out and again I realized why we brought Craig as he loaded the trophy on his pack frame. If we were going to arrive back at the hunting vehicle at the same time, I decided I should have a 10 minute head start. Jim said, "If you want to traverse this properly the easiest way, go down at an angle and come up at the opposite angle like a V. "Yeah, yeah, yeah, whatever," I thought. It's still vertical up and down. But that technique did work; I got back to the vehicle in a lot better shape than I had gotten to the other side. Finally, here came Jim and Craig up from the abyss, headlights shining and horns sticking out on both sides of Craig's pack. I just know Lisa will love her present.

When we arrived back at the lodge around 10:00 that night, the stars seemed so close you could touch them in the black sky. The constellation Cassiopeia was up and Polaris; the North Star was just underneath. We set the two rams side by side, and under the lights they looked like "guantes" or twins. What a hunt! What an experience! Hunting free range sheep is not a give me. The terrain is tough, the environment is harsh, and the territory is vast, but I learned how to hunt sheep. Now I know where to look for sheep on a mountain range or ridge top, how to locate their trails through a saddle between two mountains, how to identify a shooter and how to approach a rock face to get in the best position for a shot. I was thinking , "I'll be so excited to get home and show Lisa that I shot her a trophy ram as well. I'm sure she will be just as excited with her present as I am. She can even take her pick!"

P.S. She was not quite as excited as I was –

P.S.S. The Christmas present she actually wants may be much more expensive than I initially thought –

*May you have a blessed Christmas and a safe Holiday Season*

*George K. Hill is a free-lance outdoors writer and lives in Boerne, Texas, with his lovely wife Lisa. They have 3 grown children.*