Our professional hunting begins each year down on the “Rock” in April, and this year we started on the 11th with Tom Roles of Prior Lake, Minnesota.

Kodiak was thick with snow again, so we had snowshoes strapped to our packs as we trudged up the Zachar River into chilling sleet. My son Kiche was packing, co-guiding and video taping the expedition, and his help on any hunt can't be over valued.

Flooding the year before had destroyed our usual campsites, or covered them in mud, now further compromised with slushy snow, and we went into camp at Six Mile Bend damp and cold that first night.

A good night's sleep perked us up and the next day from a lookout Tom spotted the second bear of the trip when it popped out of a snow den. He was good sized, but he kept traveling up valley, and finally disappeared into thick woods.

The next afternoon I spotted a big bear climbing a far, up valley, mountain and leaving a wide trail through the snow. He eventually disappeared into a high bowl. In the morning we broke camp and headed up river where we hoped to get another look at him. When we were directly below the bowl we spotted him up there puttering around the way bears do, but he kept walking and climbing and went over the top, so we continued on up to Ten Mile Camp.

It had been a beautiful day, but in the afternoon clouds built out of the east and about then I spotted two bears in succession while Kiche and Tom were gathering grass for bedding. The first one was missing part of his left ear and looked huge with an extremely thick, very blunt nose. I really wanted this bear, but we never saw him again. He was on a ridge line, and never left tracks on our side, so we had to believe he went down the other way, although the weather was so horrendous the next few days tracks could have been obliterated.

That evening was the beginning of about 64 hours spent in and around the tent while a mix of rain and snow blew down the Zachar walled inside clouds and fog. Have you got patience? While we did get up on a glassing knob on the afternoon of the storm's 3rd day we were met with blowing snow and zero zero visibility.

The next day dawned with promise; in the afternoon Kiche spotted a medium sized bear up river while I was trying to find the bear that had made a big trail in the snow on a nearby mountain. Then Tom spotted a bear over on his side. I think Tom's bear was the same one he had spotted down river on the second day, the rub marks and size matched, and it seemed like Tom and this bear were converging.

We bedded him down at dark, and when he was still there the next morning we made a climb up the mountain. At 244 yards Tom set up with his 300. Closer is always better, so I blew my bleat deer call, and that brought the bear's head up to stare down the mountain. After a couple minutes Kiche said, “Do you want me to break a stick?”

“Yeah, sure...I'll blow the deer call right after.”

When that stick broke the bear exploded out of his bed and charged down the mountain. At about 150 yards Tom hit him and the bear ran into thick alders. After a few minutes we could just make out the bear's broadside silhouette and Tom got his second shot off which made the bear leap up into the air and run down slope to our right. Tom's 3rd shot rolled the bear head over feet; he came up fighting mad and biting alders. Tom's 4th round dropped him for good.

He was a big ole bear and Tom loved him rubs and all. He squared out 9 feet 10 inches with a 26 2/16” skull. On our way down the mountain, at the edge of a canyon, we ran into a herd of mountain goats that spread out in a line facing us at about 30 yards. There was something about their fearless demeanor that made me comment, “I wonder if anyone has ever been charged by a band of mountain goats?” In light of the killing of a hiker by a billy in Washington State this fall it isn't an absurd idea. Photographers have been charged by nannies defending new born kids, and there are two cases up here where a grizzly and goat killed each other. A mountain goat never gives up its' life easily.

At the end of his hunt Tom said, “This has been the toughest hunt I've ever done – and the best.”

For May we welcomed Steve Gentry and Steve Dougherty from the fine state of Minnesota. My daughter Kaasan came down to pack on Dougherty's hunt and she and my guide Andy Hawk took him up into Ten Mile Country where we'd just hunted. They were hoping to find that giant bear we'd seen up there in April. Along the way they hunted out of Six Mile Bend for a couple of days where they observed a really large but badly rubbed bear. Because of his size they seriously thought about stalking him. They later showed me a video they took from across the valley and he did look “impressive”. But in the end Steve decided he wanted something with more hair on it.

A week of hunting put them up in Brownie Pass where Dougherty connected on a well furred boar that squared out at 9 feet 9 inches with a 26 2/16” skull. On the stalk they ran into an even bigger, but rubbed up bear, that crashed off at close range giving them a start. Continuing on they managed to get above their quarry and within 45 yards. Steve's first shot with his 300 ultra mag. missed somehow – maybe clipping an alder limb – his second rolled the bear over killing it.

To hear them tell it they spent the whole hunt trying to spot a bead of sweat on Kaasan's brow – without any luck. Kaasan's a workout machine, and I could have told them they had a better chance of seeing 80 degrees than sweat. She packed the bear hide all ten miles on their way out.

Meanwhile Gentry, Kiche and I hunted three days around the bay, seeing some interesting bears in non-stalking situations, before deciding to back pack up into little Zachar on the 4th day.

On the 5th – sunny and warm – we were packing up into Pallansch Creek when we heard a mighty roar and turned around to see an avalanche crashing down the other side of the valley. It was big, and traveled far down the mountain, and it stayed in our minds.

We were seeing decent sized bears every day, but on the 6th we saw one in the 10 foot class walking the skyline. It was evening and snow slides had been roaring all afternoon and this bear kept trying to come down, but then he'd chicken out and go back up. He clearly respected the conditions and ended up going over the top.

The next day we were hoping he'd be back on our side, and we were on it until all three of us accidentally dozed off at the same time in mid afternoon (a nap recharges the batteries, but normally we take turns). When I awoke I saw a big bear cruising along above us heading out towards the bay. I back tracked his trail with my binoculars all the way to the corner at Spiridon. The sucker had dropped into our valley just upstream of camp with a perfect stalking wind in our face, then climbed the other side. It was painful. We whined like babies, and drank bitter tea until that night when we saw a bear that made us forget the first one.

He looked old, and walked with a huge swagger. We bedded him down in a tight wad of alders at the head wall of Little Zachar in the dark.

We were up early. The wind was workable so we began side hilling to where we'd last seen him. Deep snow, the mountain's sharp pitch, alders, elderberry and salmon berry made the trip hell, but the wind held. Half way there I set up my spotting scope and spotted him almost hidden in the grass above the alders.

At about 170 yards the bear heard us and raised up. We were in bushes and froze for several minutes until he settled back down. Carefully we made another five yards to a snowdrift out in the open where Gentry could shoot from.

Once we were set I blew my deer call and the bear raised up to look. Minutes later I blew again and this time he started down towards us. He walked with a lot of attitude and crossed into a small clearing at 130 yards. Gentry was ready with his 375 H&H and knocked him rolling with a 300 grain nosler. The bear tumbled into a thick wad of elderberry and alder where Gentry added an insurance shot.

I think Gentry said this was his 3rd try at getting a brown bear after doing two hunts on the mainland where he hardly saw any bears. He got a dandy. The bear was scarred from his head to his “missing” tail which had apparently been torn off in a fight. He was a warrior. He had beautiful white claws, and Fish and Game said he was at least 22 years old. He squared out at 9 ½ feet without a tail and his skull measured 26 9/16”.

Kiche had videoed two great movies that Tom and Gentry will always have of their hunt.

In August Kaasan and I headed to the Kenai Peninsula to hunt sheep near Indian River, while Kiche and his friend Darryl walked into the Wrangell Mountains doing the same. Kaasan and I saw some nice rams we couldn't get to within the time frame we had. We were new in the area and learned valuable information to use in the future. Kiche had a fine hunt seeing 33 rams before getting one the 3rd day.

Last year I said I wasn't doing any walk in sheep hunts in the short term, but that I was open to doing fly in Chugach Mountain hunts if someone could draw a permit. As luck happened the only client I've ever had who didn't get a sheep in two attempts with me, Chance “Fat Chance” Whitney, beat the odds and drew DS 265 east of Tazlina Glacier. Chance had hunted dall sheep unsuccessfully with two other guides (Brooks Range and Talkeetnas) before going with me the first time, so when we flew in Chance was still trying to get his first sheep for the “fifth” time.

Meekins Air has always been straight with me, so when we did a little fly around without seeing any rams I believed Mike when he said, “Hell, they're around here somewheres...There's always rams around 'One Shot'. You'll find them.” Of course Mike wasn't factoring in Chance's sheep hunting history, and I wasn't sure I liked a spot called “One Shot”. What's that suppose to mean? You've got one shot at getting the plane down or we crash? You get one shot at the rams before they run out of the country? Or maybe everyone kills their sheep in here with one shot?

Once on the ground I immediately spotted two rams – one a big full curl – looking down at us and the two super cubs. As the planes took off the big ram's gaze followed them down valley; it seemed innocent enough, but we never saw those rams again despite all but encircling their mountain the next day.

Let's take a tour of One Shot and Kiana Creek and their upper tributaries.

The first day we loaded up camp and about 8 days of food and climbed through a saddle that led into Kiana. The two rams had disappeared over to this side the night before but there was no sign of them. There were 30 ewes and lambs. We cut across to a bowl on the far side and camped. We saw two small rams that day.

In the morning we broke camp and climbed over the head wall to look into a major drainage to Kiana. Lots of sheep, around 60 ewes and lambs, but no rams. We went down this valley and followed it back to the main stem of Kiana where we camped after a tiring day.

Next day we loaded up and climbed straight up over a sizable mountain to look into a large green bowl that emptied into One Shot several miles downstream of the airstrip. As we sat up there glassing shark tooth ridge lines, white ice glaciers and yellow-green-red valleys counting more ewes and lambs – we were up to 125 sheep, only 4 of which had been rams – Chance said, “I knew it wouldn't be easy.”

We dropped into the bowl and camped by a clear pond surrounded by a noisy hoary marmot colony. The next day – for the first time – we left our camp and climbed to the top of another mountain to peek into a no name drainage to the north. Four rams, two of them full curls, on the far side!

In the morning we packed up camp for the 4th time and went to the top. All day we watched them and when darkness came we followed it down into their valley. Swirling winds whipped the area in the morning with fog and rain and we had to retreat from our one attempted stalk that afternoon. I said, “We'll get him in the morning...We'll go up in the dark.”

And that is just what we did. Two shots at dawn, 200 yards out, and, “Oh Man”, Chance finally had his sheep! A big bodied, thick horned ram only 7 ½ years old, but about 40” X 14 ¼” X 35 3/8” X 14 3/8”. It was a beautiful morning, and we sat there with the ram a long time savoring the experience.

The next day we packed all the meat to the top of the mountain and covered it on an old snow drift; the day following that we packed horns, cape and gear to the top, and repacked our loads with the meat inside and the lighter stuff strapped and dangling on the outside. Each of us carried well over 100 lbs.

Once down in the bottom we had to fight our way up steam through some nasty thick willows. In one such thicket I stirred up a nest of yellow jackets and they were plenty mad by the time Chance came through. Even 7 stings and a “gut check” load couldn't dim Chance's spirits.

The valley we had taken the ram in eventually joined One Shot down near Tazlina Glacier and Chance wanted to give it a name. After a minute I said, “How about “The Last Chance Fork of One Shot?” He laughed, “I like it...I do”.

In September Michael Gleason of Berlin, Massachusetts, who's hunted many times with us, came up on a moose hunt. We started on the 13th in weather warmer than I like for moose hunting.

On our first full day we saw about 20 moose, but surprisingly, none of them were bulls. We were having clear nights but no real frosts; day time highs were running 55 to 60 degrees – warmer than normal.

On the second day we again counted close to 20 moose, but this time we saw 6 bulls, 3 of them 50 or better. Near dark two small bulls were battling in the muskeg flat below us and 3 big ones were ghosting in and out of the timber on the far side. These bulls were grunting and skirmishing, and they gave the evening an electric anticipation, but before we could do anything darkness fell.

In the morning it was quiet. After awhile we heard a bull grunting back in the trees and I answered by thrashing a tree with my moose scapula, bull grunting, and cow moaning. Finally we could just make him, screened by tree limbs. He stood with his left foreleg dangling free of the ground. When he moved he limped heavily.

I guessed he'd been hurt in battle, and Mike and I joked that maybe we should take him before he died of his wounds. I estimated his spread around 53 inches. Before long he faded into the trees, and then I could hear him grunting a ways out and pounding a tree with his antlers. As the day warmed the woods went silent.

Time for a nap in the sun. I was snoozing happily when Mike's hissing whisper broke through my dreams, “That bull is coming in! I heard him grunting, so I tried a few grunts myself. I don't know if it did any good, but he sounds closer.”

Within 10 minutes two cows and the “Limper” appeared, and this time the bull moved into a clearing, and he looked a little bigger. “Now I think he's about 55 inches,” I said, “Somewhere around there”.

“And I'm thinking about taking him,” Mike whispered, “My back is killing me the last day or so”.

“It's up to you,” I said, “There's bigger ones around”. The bull's hide glistened black, much darker than the cows', and when he suddenly took off after a cow his gate smoothed out at a run, but the running seemed to trigger Mike's predatory instincts. Never run from a predator.

The bull and cow swung through open spruce and birch forest down into a valley underneath our lookout. When the bull stopped about 90 yards away Mike drove a 180 grain nosler partition out of his 30/06 down through the bull's “right antler” and into his right shoulder. The slug broke shoulder bones and then slid through his lungs and into the off side. He hadn't meant to go through the antler, but the bull turned his head suddenly. The moose staggered behind some trees and gave up a rending death moan, the likes of which I can't remember hearing before.

He was a handsome animal with a spread of 55 inches, but he didn't have as much fat as normal. Because it was in the mid to upper 50's the blow flies were maddening; fortunately we had some real good game bags, and that night brought our first real frost which cooled things down some.

On October 3rd Kiche, Kaasan, and I headed for Kodiak. Two past clients Bruce Pelletier and Jerry Mullins from New Hampshire and Massachusetts respectively were meeting us there for a flight into Windy Lake at the head of the Zachar River for a mountain goat hunt.

There was fresh snow on the mountains surrounding Windy, which at 2073 feet has a different feel compared to coastal Kodiak. It's cold, raw, and barren in October, and you feel an uncharacteristic vulnerability as you scan the sharp rock, the ice bergs floating in the lake, last winter's lingering snow drifts, and the green moss you initially took for life giving grass. It feels like a foreign land, even some distant planet; a big part of that is you left the warm coast under the sun, in a plane, and you didn't arrive here in stages, like if you had walked in, but are just abruptly plopped down after flying through clouds and snow squalls, and you feel a kind of culture shock.

Bruce and Jerry were both 62 and Bruce has had a hip replaced on one side and a knee on the other, and I was inspired by his determination to get a mountain goat. As for Jerry, he kept saying, “I wanted to go on a moose hunt, but nooooo... Bruce said we needed to get a couple of goats”. Long time hunting buddies will have these disagreements. They were, however, in agreement that any adult goat would suit them just fine.

On day two Kiche and Jerry had hiked down canyon while Bruce, Kaasan and I had climbed through a pass to the south. We saw 14 distant goats on our trek and arrived back at camp plenty worn. Kiche and Jerry didn't show until 3 hours after dark at 11:00 P.M. They'd gotten an 8 1/2” billy goat that broke 1/4” off both horn tips when he tumbled down the mountain.

Their story was a doozy. Along the way Jerry had fallen hard in a rock slide hurting his left leg and twisting his right ankle. He got up humbled, hurting in so many places he didn't realize he'd cut his hand too. His glove held the blood back for awhile, but then Kiche noticed the handle of Jerry's ice axe was streaked with red. As Kiche bandaged him up Jerry said, “I wanted to go moose hunting”.

They saw one large billy looking down at them, and then he turned and climbed up through snowfields and great slabs of chiseled rock and on into the clouds and all they could do was shake their heads.

Late that afternoon found them looking up at another, smaller, billy. Jerry asked, “How big is that one?”

Kiche figured it for 7 ½ to 8 ½ inches and Jerry said, “Big enough.” They stalked straight up underneath the billy to within 200 yards, and Jerry laid down across a hard edge of the mountain and hit the goat below the chin with his 300 Winchester knocking the goat off his perch, tumbling him towards their position. The goat went down one cut, but for some reason a bunch of dislodged rocks came right at them. Kiche yelled, “Move! Move! Get out! Go left, Go left!”

Jerry was totally confused. All he could think was, “Is the goat charging? Or what?” As he tried to react to Kiche's yells he flashed back to his marine drill sergeant's screams and then he felt Kiche's hand grab his back flinging him to the left just as a basketball sized rock that would have killed crashed past them along with numerous satellite rocks. It made their legs weak in its aftermath.

Still shaken, they butchered the goat and packed him down to a snow drift and hid the meat, hide, and horns in a snow cave. Now it was dark, and as they walked along they kept seeing moving lights in a pass above them and Kiche said, “It must be Dad and my Sister, and Bruce, coming in late too...Either that, or aliens”. I noticed every time aliens were mentioned Jerry would get this sick look on his face. Jerry was a retired cop so maybe he's met them before, or maybe he thought his cover was blown.

When we told them we had been in our sleeping bags since dark, Kiche said, “Well, that is weird...We saw lights...And they were moving” Maybe we did land on another planet, but Bruce and I decided the easiest way to avoid the night lights was to get back to camp “before” dark.

The next day gave us mixed rain and snow, and Bruce and I stayed in our tent while the other three went to retrieve the goat. It's surprising how many coastal grizzlies you'll see up in this barren country, so I was relieved when they got back with the whole goat that afternoon.

For the next 7 days Bruce, Kaasan, and I kept at it. There were lots of goats, but not many billies, and many of the goats weren't accessible to us for one reason or another. We had two opportunities but just couldn't close on them.

Bruce had a $1600.00 scope that you adjusted to any given range by turning the vertical adjustment up or down, something that made me nervous, as I have not found scope adjustments to be that accurate. After several such adjustments a check of his rifle's zero revealed that it had gone from 2” high at the 100 yard setting to dead on at 100 yards.

Here's my advice: Forget scopes with fancy aiming points and, or, long range ring turret adjustments; save some money; buy a quality scope with a plain ole cross hair. You don't need electronics either. If you can't see the cross hairs in a quality scope super imposed on your quarry you “should not be shooting”.

Most hunters have a range finder these days; the hold over at 300 to 400 yards isn't rocket science, understanding some of these scopes is. All you have to remember is your bullet's approximate trajectory which for everything from the modest 257 Roberts to the brain jarring 378 Weatherby is a lot closer than most hunters realize. As an example: A 30/06 with 180 grain spitzer at 2700 f.p.s. Sighted 2” high at 100 yards will be about 8” low at 300 yards. A 300 Weatherby with the same bullet at 3100 f.p.s. Will be approximately 3” low – a difference of 5 measly inches. At 400 yards the 30/06 will be 23” low, while the 300 is down 13, the difference is less than the length of your bare foot. At 500 yards no one should be shooting at an unwounded animal, but the difference in drop is 16 inches.

So, the hold over for most common cartridges is easy to see at any reasonable range. At 400 yards you are looking at one foot over the hair line with a 30/06. The real break through was the range finder which allows us to know the exact distance and hence where to hold. Pretty simple. Before range finders you had to guess the range; you were almost always off to a degree, hence a super flat shooting cartridge with less bullet path deviation was easier to hit with, but that is largely mitigated now.

Bruce's hunt came down to the last day, the 10th day of hunting. We climbed into a pass above camp and spotted a lone nanny goat at the top of a seriously steep rock slide. Though difficult, I thought we might be able to get up there.

Our first attempt got us to within 468 yards. We were sitting there thinking things over when Bruce suggested we might be able to climb to the cliffs above us by retreating a short distance and then climbing a shallow gully. I said, “Good idea, I think it might work.”

It was a mean climb with loose rocks rolling and sliding out from under our boots every step; an hour and change later we were hunkered down 312 yards away, all you could see was a goat head. After a while the goat got up, turned around, and laid back down looking the other way. We lined up a big rock between us and sneaked to within 100 yards. Then Bruce crawled out on a cliff and slid his 300 Winchester over the edge as the goat walked towards him at about 75 yards.

One shot and the goat dropped out of sight down a rock chute. We didn't know what lay underneath the goat's plunge, but it looked terrible steep. We followed the slide down edging the cliffs but couldn't see anything at the bottom where the goat should have been. A search revealed that the goat had bounced down the rock groove, and then, with perfect accuracy, struck a snow cave opening not much bigger than a sleeping labrador and disappeared 40 feet underneath it. Yowsa!

Kaasan was the smallest, so she put on her head lamp and with a hank of pack board rope in each hand crawled down the hole and found the goat with both horns broken off about 3 inches above the bases. We got two ropes on the goat, but the three of us couldn't pull it up past some protruding rocks.

Luckily Kiche and Jerry had heard Bruce's shot from camp and climbed up into the pass hoping to help out, and we were able to get their attention. Once Kiche got up to us we were able to pull the goat up and even found one of the broken horns in the process which fit it's base perfectly.

I can tell you that I've never been in a group of hunters and guides happier than we were right then. It was a special time, with great companions, coming on the last day, after so many struggles. The Bionic man showed what persistence can do for you. The nanny measured 9” with the horn taped on.

After the goat hunt Kiche and I had a week to rest up, fish, and hunt ducks before the last hunt of the year.

Our bear hunter was Keith Peter of Monroe, Washington. On October 24th we took an extremely high tide up into the Zachar River and hiked up to Two Mile Knob. In the morning – opening day – we continued towards a spot just down river of Six Mile Bend, but on a bench well above the river. As we hiked along staying away from the river as much as possible, we periodically glassed the mountains and saw 10 brown bears up high. Along the way we also saw several beavers and watched a cottonwood tree topple into their pond - “Pop, pop, pop, crash!”. There were “little brown wrens” (one of my favorite birds), belted king fishers, and pine grosbeaks, in addition to the ever present crows, magpies, ravens and bald eagles. We ran into 6 black tailed deer including one pretty good sized buck and another buck we “smelled with ease”, but saw only his butt disappearing into alders. We imagined his antlers as big and as strong as his odor.

During our first day of watching from our mountain lookout we saw 4 bears working the river for salmon. The most interesting bear was in the 10 foot class and missing his entire left ear. He was very active and covered a lot of ground. Part of his fishing technique was to charge through the water and then go up on his hind legs and “walk like a man” looking down into the pools. It had an eerie, visceral, human feel; it is so man like. Their backs are ramrod straight, their steps smooth. Despite a lot of work he only caught one salmon that we could see (though he was out of sight at times) and after it was gone we watched him lick the gravel bar for several minutes as though he was still tasting the memory.

A second fishing method observed was the “run and gun” which consists of speed chasing salmon in shallow water, sometimes launching at full velocity from a gravel bar first.

Then there's the “snorkeler”, a bear that prefers deeper water. They walk slowly along on all fours their head under water using their eyes to see fish, only bringing their head out occasionally to breathe. The snorkeler is the “fly fisher” of the bear world. He's quiet, barely rippling the surface; your first thought is it's a beaver; then you realize it's the top of a bear's hump moving. The snorkeler will sometimes swim and snorkel at the same time in slow waters too deep to wade using their big paddle shaped paws to hold their position in the current. They often come up with a fish in their jaws without making a splash.

A fourth fishing style is the “concussion method” or “belly flopper” which consists of launching off a vertical river bank, log or stump in a mighty belly flop of displaced water. I guess the idea is to stun their prey. It doesn't seem to be as effective as the snorkeler and run and gun methods. The walk like a man and pounce style works best in small, but relatively deep pools.

The 3rd day brought rain and snow mixed and a mountain goat trying to cross the river just downstream of our camp. Several hours earlier we had watched two goats coming down towards the river, but they were 4 miles downstream at Two Mile Knob. Was this one of them? It seemed obvious at the time that the two were going from the north side to the south side. The single goat was going from the south side to the north side. You never know where or when you might run into a goat.

On the sixth day a storm was moving in with rising temperatures and the bears really started moving. Just before dark we saw a “big boy” wading down the river at the top of Six Mile Bend. We hurried down to the last ridge above the river hoping he would continue downstream to us. As we were getting into position I noticed another bear downstream of our position that looked “huge”. I pointed it out to Kiche and he said, “He looks over ten to me.” The breezes were drifting downstream and there was nothing we could do on him. We waited until dark, but our up river bear had stalled out up stream somewhere.

At first light in the morning the wind was whipping down the mountainside above us and washing out over the valley. When I looked at the river I saw a small bear running hard upstream, obviously having smelled me , and seconds later I noticed a real big bear walking down the middle of the river. I ran to the tent to get Keith, and when we got back there were no bears in sight. Then it started raining. The wind was taking our scent all over the place so we dove back into the tent to contain the damage. It had been a disappointing 24 hours.   
 The winds were against us the whole hunt. Not once did they align northwest or southeast, either of which runs with the Zachar Valley. They were always either northeast or southwest, which is perpendicular to the valley and causes disjointed, erratic wind directions, meaning you don't dare to get down on a bear most of the time because he's going to smell you, and you will then not see him again.

Some bears you'll see only once as it was with “One Ear” and “Ten Plus”, others you might see numerous times as it was with the bear we called “Light Sides”.

It all came together for us on the 8th day, the wind was very light and lazing down the river. I wasn't happy with our camp location so we pulled up and moved. We were able to walk in the water up stream so that we didn't leave scent with our feet – yeah - if it's not raining or snowing a bear will easily smell your foot prints and leave the area. The situation was so comfortable - wind wise - at Six Mile Bend we decided to stake it out.

An hour later Keith said, “Here comes a bear.”

He came from up river rocking side to side, the way the big ones do, walking right at us. Keith carried a pre 64 Winchester Alaskan 338 mag and all he had to do was crawl forward a couple of yards to get past a bush, and wait. At about 70 yards the bear turned to walk up the same bank we'd come out of the water onto and I said, “You'd better get him now...before he smells our tracks.”

Keith's first shot brought a growl and spun the bear around like a top biting at himself. The second 250 grain nosler drove into his back as he tried to climb up the far bank. He then staggered out of sight up a beaver channel and behind grass covered hummocks.

We waited five minutes and then slowly approached to find him down, but not out. Keith's final round at 10 yards forced a loud growl as he rose to all fours and then rolled over - four paws to the air. He was the bear we had called “Light Sides”, the most active one we'd seen. He squared out 9'11” with a 26 1/16” skull.

Four days later Keith killed a beautiful 3x4 Sitka blacktail with brow tines, a great ending to his hunt. Kiche had gotten what we believe to be fine HD footage of the entire hunt. I can't wait to see it all put together.

From a hunting perspective it was a terrific year with everyone taking good animals on the kind of expeditions Nin Ridge Guides is known for.

Any of you interested in big sheep, I would urge you to apply online for hunts DS 260 1st choice (2 non-resident permits) and DS 265 (8 non-resident permits) 2nd choice. The cost for this sheep hunt is $11,950 “with packer”. There are big sheep in these areas. To apply it's $5.00 each choice plus an $85.00 hunting license unless you hunted up here this year, in which case you can use that license # on you application. If you didn't hunt here in 2010 you must purchase a license online for 2011 before applying. Also, I'll need to mail you a guide/client agreement that we both have to sign with your hunting license # written in and dated “before” or on the same day as your application. You can apply online through the end of December. Let me know if you are interested in applying so I can mail the above agreement.

Moose hunts and brown bear hunts are booked for 2011. All 2012 brown bear hunts are open at the present.

I'm looking for a goat hunter for 2011. We have lots of goats. The cost with packer $8,450.00 plus $600.00 air fare.

We are all fine and healthy and up to our waists in chickens – just kidding – well, we do have a lot of them, plus two “giant” bunnies and a duck, but mostly we are going to the birds. Now I have to call our ranch “Ole Mc Donna's Chicken Farm.” (Uh huh....*verrryyy* funny Dude…..*Donna*) Hey! I have a security breach! KB

The one sour note for the year was my Dad passing away in June at 92 and my Mom's continued fragile health. A few of you knew my parents from years ago. It's all part of life and we have the comfort that they had a good run with few regrets.

We hope all is well with our friends scattered across the country, and we wish everyone Merry Christmas and a fine New Year.

The Braendels