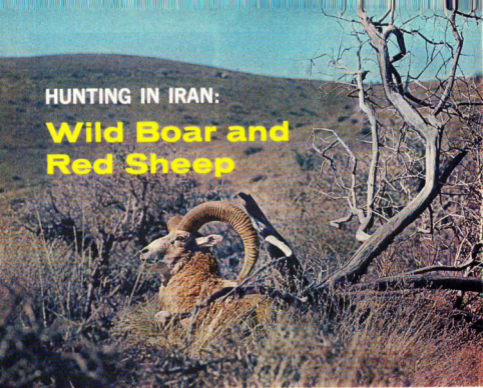


HUNTING IN IRAN:

Wild Boar and Red Sheep



Red ram, caught unaware by my camera, is bedded in meadow atop Ghoyoon Daghi, an island in Iranian landlocked saltwater lake

Our Iranian hunt winds up in a rugged forest rooted up by foraging boars and on the lonely island stronghold of some strange wild sheep **By ERWIN A. BAUER**

Hossein sketches in snow Laylin's scope-caused miss of ram



*In **OUTDOOR LIFE** for May, Erwin Bauer described the first part of his Iran hunting trip, during which he and his partner, Jack Antrim, took heavy-horned ibex and urials. In this article Bauer tells about other big game they faced in this challenging exotic land.*

THE HANDFUL of big-game hunters who have visited Iran have been pleasantly surprised. Iran is a beautiful land in western Asia that in places has an abundance of wild game, including some species that are rare or do not exist anywhere else.

The country does not suffer from the human overpopulation that has made life ugly and has despoiled the land elsewhere in Asia. And thanks in part to the intense interest and influence of Prince Abdorrezza Pahlavi, a big-game hunter who is well-known to **OUTDOOR LIFE** readers, Iran can boast of the only active wildlife-conservation program in the Middle East. A number of Iranian national parks and game reserves have been



At left, Jack Antrim shows his ram against Lake Rezaieyh backdrop. Below, game guide Hossein Hashenzadeh and Dave Laylin tape the horns of ram Laylin got with one shot



established. And there is an Iran Game and Fish Department, the staff of which includes two American biologists and researchers.

For a week Jack Antrim and I had hunted with David Laylin in the Mohammad Reza Shah Reserve in the eastern Elburz Mountains. Jack is a farmer near Worthington in central Ohio and a friend of mine. We have hunted widely together in North America and Africa. Both of us are 50, and by exercising we try to keep in year-round physical condition for big-game hunting.

David is the young manager of Iran Safaris, the only hunting outfitter licensed in that country. He came to Iran originally on a holiday and liked it so well that he stayed and organized the company.

In *OUTDOOR LIFE* for May I described how Jack and I bagged good urials on our first day of hunting and how we later collected two magnificent Persian-ibex trophies. During that time we had seen hundreds of other urials, a few maral stags, roe deer, a herd of goitered gazelles, a golden cat, and more wild boars than anyone had bothered to count.

But now that our urial and ibex hunting was out of the way and we wanted to bag a boar, we had a harder time finding the pigs. What happened one day is typical.

That morning, less than a mile from camp, we spotted a band of about 35 ibex deployed over the face of a cliff. A number of billies were in the group, but they paid very little attention to us—as if they knew we were hunting boars and not goats.

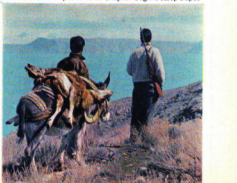
In a wooded hollow not far away, we came across three maral stags. Marals are really a subspecies of the European red deer, which is a cousin of the North American elk. We were surprised to see that one of these stags was still carrying his antlers even though this was the end of February.

That afternoon we saw something even more remarkable. Following David Laylin, we had switchbacked our way onto the same rocky ridge where we had seen sev-



Having stalked to within 30 yards of his ram, Laylin fires

Burro was used to pack kills off Ghoyoon Daghi's steep slopes





Details of tusks and snout of huge boar

Wild Boar and Red Sheep

continued

eral large boars a few days before. But this time, upon reaching the crest we were treated to a spectacle seldom seen by anyone anywhere.

On a rocky outcropping partly covered with snow and just opposite us—only 125 yards away—were two leopards. From the way they lolled and cavorted in the sunshine they were obviously a mating pair. We watched them through glasses for five minutes or so.

Even at 125 yards it was possible to see the difference between these spotted cats and the dozen or so yellowish leopards that I have seen in East Africa. These were grayish and had more luxuriant coats, as opposed to the very short sleek coats of their African cousins.

Ounces, or snow leopards, also inhabit this Elburz high country, but they are smaller and furrier and have longer bushy tails. The snow (*Felis uncia*) is very rare,

while the common leopard (*Panthera pardus*) is fairly abundant in most of the mountainous regions of Iran.

David suggested that Jack or I take a shot at the largest leopard, but both of us had shot leopards before in Africa and now preferred just to watch the magnificent animals. Eventually one of the cats caught our scent, and both vanished like ghosts.

We never did see any good boars that day.

Next day was similar, except that we located a bear grazing in a high meadow. This bruin was an Asiatic brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), a close relative of the North American grizzly and very similar in size. To me it appeared to be the size of a smallish or medium-size grizzly.

We decided to have a closer look, but a serious stalk failed. The bear, evidently just out of hibernation, was traveling, and we never could catch up with it.

Not long after the bear incident, we sat on a rocky bluff to scan the long and sparsely wooded valley. Right away David spotted a boar, but it was a small one with barely visible tusks. No trophy animal there.

Then, much closer and almost directly below us, appeared a band of nine, and they were coming up the slope right toward us.

What followed could have been a tense moment—the

I pose by my 400-pound wild porker, taken as evening shadows lengthened in Elburz forest that boars seemed to have forsaken





We paused in Qum, holy city then menaced by snowmelt runoff

pigs came within 20 feet of our position before they spotted us, snorted in alarm, and bolted back down the hill. But they weren't the truculent old males we'd hoped for; instead, they were a sow with a litter of half-grown young.

"All I could think about when I saw those young ones," Jack said, grinning, "was a hot pork barbecue."

That evening David reminded us that the next day was our last in the reserve and that we would then have to move across the country for the last part of our hunt, for red sheep.

"We'd better take the first good boar to come along," he said.

"If it comes along," I added.

David, Jack, and I were in the woods long before the sun appeared over the mountains. A few days before, the woods must have been packed with pigs. There was scarcely a square yard of ground that hadn't been rooted up in the search for acorns, succulent roots, and bulbs. But no sign of boars did we see that morning.

"With the melting of the snows," David conceded, "they may have already headed for the high country."

By late afternoon we still hadn't seen a male with good tusks.

"We're a good distance from the car," David said finally. "Let's start hiking back, or we'll be in the field long after dark."

The whole valley was in deep-blue shadow when things began to happen. First I noticed a movement on the slope above and ahead of us. Initially it appeared to be a large bear, but through glasses it became a huge black boar, bigger than any we'd seen since the day I haggled my ibex. This one was traveling away and would soon be out of sight and range.

"Take him," David whispered. "Right now."

No rifle rest was handy, so I dropped to a sitting position. I had a hard time picking up the target in my 3 to 9X Leupold Vari-X scope, and when I did, despite the light-gathering power of the optics, the animal wasn't easy to follow. But it was now or never.

I held on the porker's shoulder, swung with him, and squeezed. At my shot the boar came rolling down the mountain, and at the bottom it kicked its last.

"Good going," Jack said. "In another few minutes you couldn't have seen that boar clear enough to shoot."

We didn't waste any time in examining the tusks. Night was falling. We quickly field-dressed the animal and then began the long sweaty labor of dragging it out to the road. David had estimated the boar at 400 pounds, but by the time we reached the car in pitch blackness an hour later, it seemed to weigh at least half a ton. I hadn't been so *(confused on page 99)*



A view of typical high country on uninhabited Ghoyoon Dagh



Dave and Hossein with my red sheep. Horns taped 30 inches

My sheep is skinned at old stone barn where burros are kept



WILD BOAR, RED SHEEP

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bushed and leg weary in a long, long time.

Later, for the record, we measured the lower tusks; they were eight inches long. David told us that some boars taken in Iran had tusks a foot long.

Early the next morning we headed westward. I hated to leave the Reza Shah Reserve, and I said so to David.

"I always hate to leave myself," he replied. "But I predict you'll like the Lake Reza'yeh hunting just as well."

Reza'yeh is a landlocked saltwater lake in Azerbaijan province, in extreme northwestern Iran. From the lake, on an extremely clear day, it might be possible to see Mt. Ararat on the Turkish border. The lake covers about 2,500 square miles, is at an elevation of 4,100 feet, and contains a number of islands, which are really mountains poking high above the lake's surface.

One of the islands is 7,500-acre Ghoyoon Daghi. The name means sheep mountain, and that's appropriate since 650 to 700 Armenian red sheep dwell on that otherwise uninhabited bit of real estate. No one really knows the origin of the sheep—whether they are an original natural population or whether they were stocked years ago, perhaps to provide a royal hunting preserve.

There is even confusion about the identification of the sheep on Ghoyoon Daghi Island. In his book, *The Great Arc of the Wild Sheep*, the late James Clark of the American Museum of Natural History calls this one the Urmian (Urmia was a former name for Lake Reza'yeh) urial, *Ovis gmelini urmiana*. But Jerry Hassinger, University of Montana-trained biologist and researcher with the Iran Game and Fish Department, insists that it is *Ovis ammon orientalis* and calls it the Armenian or western red sheep.

To reach this lonely island and its strange sheep, we drove westward along the shore of the Caspian Sea. En route we passed in Babolsar, a Caspian port and center of Iran's vast caviar industry. There we saw sturgeon being "milked" of the world's best caviar and bought enough of the pearl-colored eggs to last the rest of our trip. The price is only a fraction of what Iranian caviar costs in the U.S.

In Tehran we caught an Iran Airlines flight to the ancient Persian city of Tabriz and then on to the city of Reza'yeh. There we were joined by Hossein Hashenzadeh, a government game warden and guide.

Hossein was a very shy and raggedly handsome man. His face was deeply tanned and had the characteristic creases around the eyes of a man who has long squinted into the sun.

Late the following evening we loaded all our gear onto a boat for the trip to Ghoyoon Daghi. And Hossein supervised the loading of a pair of reluctant barros.

"These," he explained, "will carry the sheep down from the mountains."

Our boat deserves description. Of

World War I vintage and built in Russia as a steamer, the 80-foot MS Ashgar had recently been converted to diesel power but had not been painted in many years, if ever. Jack described the boat as "rich rust-colored all over."

During the three-hour trip I slept in the musty hold beside a charcoal stove, simply because the temperature was near freezing out on deck. We arrived in camp—a comfortable stone cottage and the only dwelling on the island—just after midnight. A small stone barn nearby was silhouetted in the moonlight.

Throughout our visit to Iran up to this point, we had enjoyed excellent weather, perhaps better than is typical for February and March. Often it was cool or cold, but the skies were bright. Now suddenly it began to rain, and the rain changed to sleet and snow and back to rain again. The elements kept us in camp for one day.

Sheep hunting is permitted all year in Iran. Perhaps midwinter is the best time to hunt the sheep. They are then at a lower elevation because of snow in the high country. But the midwinter hunter also faces the worst hunting weather. If the visitor wants to combine sheep (and ibex) with hunting for the antlered game (maral stags and red deer), late fall and early winter are the best times. After that the stags and deer are likely to have lost their antlers.

Our second day on the island was

slightly better, and in a drizzle we hiked up the draw directly behind camp. Hossein had told us that only two freshwater springs existed on the island and that one was in the upper part of this draw. Some sheep are usually concentrated around it, he added.

No more than a half-mile from camp we spotted three rams. And they were very spooky. Hossein had mentioned that only three parties of hunters had visited the island in the last decade, and yet these sheep were off and running the moment they saw us. That is typical of all members of the Ovis family.

Jack and I had no special privilege to hunt on Ghoyoon Daghi. The island is now open to anyone; we just happened to be among the early birds. A six-day hunt from Tehran and return runs \$900 apiece for two hunters.

Several hundred yards beyond the spring another ram, bigger than the others, had been bedded down in such a position that he could not see us approach. When he did spot us it was too late, even though we were as startled as the ram. Jack had plenty of time to sight-in on the fleeing target before it escaped over a ridge, and he anchored it with the second shot from his 7 mm. Remington Magnum.

We taped the horns at 50 inches (top score for a red sheep, according to Iran Game and Fish Department records, is 35¼ inches) and congratulated Jack on a great shot. Then the drizzle

turned into a hard rain. Although we jogged most of the way downhill, we were drenched by the time we reached camp.

Next morning the overcast was broken and it appeared that the weather might improve, so we loaded lunch, water, cameras, and raingear onto one of the burros. We planned to make a complete circuit of the island, if necessary, to find a really good ram.

"Normally," David explained, "the oldest rams stay by themselves on the east side of the island. It's the steepest, most rugged part, so we'll head that way."

It was tough going around that east end of Ghoyoon Daghi. But once we topped the cliff that dropped sheer to blue Lake Rezaiyeh below, the terrain wasn't nearly so tough as the ibex country we'd hunted several days before.

Flocks of chukar partridge were everywhere and flushed all around us. But we couldn't find many sheep, and I began to wonder if the island's estimated population of 650 to 700 animals was possible. Once, we spotted two rams bedded on a rock spine with a blue seascape behind them, and we successfully stalked the animals. But David didn't consider the heads big enough to make outstanding trophies. One horn of one old ram was badly broomed.

"We're certain to find something better," he said.

By late morning we gained the high-

est peak on the island—about 6,100 feet—and there sat down to eat lunch. The longer we studied the lofty ridges all around, the more sheep we spotted.

When clouds obscured the sun it was very difficult to distinguish the reddish-brown sheep from their neutral background. But whenever the sun broke through, as it did occasionally, the animals were much easier to spot. Jack counted more than 100 within our vision at one time. It was a sight such as all sheep hunters dream about.

"Now let's take advantage of this," David suggested, "and pick out a really fine head." He then set up a Bushnell 25X spotting scope.

Big-game hunting is exciting for many reasons, and finding the unexpected is one of them. While we were scanning sheep far in the distance, the biggest ram of all was below us and just out of sight in a hidden meadow. We wouldn't have known about it at all if the pack burro hadn't wandered away. Hossein hurried to catch it, and in the process he happened to glance down over a rimrock and saw two fine rams grazing and unaware. He whistled softly and motioned for us to join him.

It was easy to see that one of the rams had very good horns—about as big as those of Jack's ram and possibly a bit longer. But there was no way to approach any closer to the sheep without spooking them, so I decided to try the long shot from above. I figured the range to be about 275 yards; David guessed 225.

My first shot missed.

Then the ram did a crazy thing. Confused, probably, about the direction of the noise, he turned and came running directly toward me up the steep slope. I suppose it is the natural reaction of a mountain animal to escape danger by climbing.

At times the ram was in view; at other times it wasn't. I waited until the range had closed to about 75 yards, and then, with the crosshairs of the 3 to 5X scope on the ram's shoulder, I fired. That's how my hunt on Lake Rezaiyeh ended abruptly.

The horns measured 30 inches long, which made the ram an exact twin of Jack's. The only reason it wasn't my quickest sheep trophy ever was that I'd made a quicker kill the week before while hunting urials in the Elburz Mountains. But I've made many sheep hunts in the past and have climbed hundreds of miles without even seeing a shootable ram.

There was one more interesting incident during our hunt on Ghoyoon Dagh. David had not yet bagged one of the island's red sheep for his own personal collection. Some time was left before the return of our boat, so he decided to try it. And I went along to film the hunt.

On the boat trip over to the island, one of the deckhands had given David's rifle (also a 7 mm. Remington Magnum) some rough handling and had dropped it. But the matter was forgotten until David missed a relatively

easy shot of 100 yards at a good ram.

Hossein, watching the action carefully, noticed that the bullet had hit soft earth about two feet above and four feet ahead of the sheep. With his forefinger he sketched this picture in a snowbank. From the sketch, David was able to adjust his scope, and this adjustment, plus a very good stalk to within 30 yards of another ram, produced a one-shot kill.

Next morning the rusty Ashgar picked us up, and we began the first and slowest leg of the trip all the way back to Ohio. On board, Jack pretty well summed up our two-week adventure.

"I know I'll keep on sheep hunting as long as my legs will carry me," he said, "but I doubt if I'll ever have better sheep hunting than we had here in Iran."

Fortunately, checking my rifle out of Iran was easier than bringing the gun in through customs. Jack decided to spend an extra week sightseeing in southern Iran, but I caught a nonstop flight to London and from there another to New York.

Amazingly, I reached home base in Columbus, Ohio, from almost the opposite side of the globe in only 14 hours of actual flying time. But even more amazing was the hunting trip just ended.

THE END

BOATING

(continued from page 22)

awash. Some owners feel that it's better to leave the drive down—that the alternate exposure to air and splashing salt water is more corrosive than exposure to the water alone. Though exposure is greatly reduced where a boat is trailered or dry-stored, an outdrive unit should be given as careful maintenance as the lower unit of an outboard.

In other respects, too, the maintenance of outboards and sterndrives can be considered comparable. With a sterndrive, check often to be sure that the engine and drive unit get proper lubrication. Follow the directions on winterizing and spring readying. Good mechanics nowadays are familiar with the makeup and requirements of sterndrives, so you should have no great problem with repairs.

Where storage is concerned, most facilities base their charges on a boat's length, so the same storage rate will apply to either an outboard or a sterndrive of equal length.

For trailering, large outboards offer no appreciable advantage over sterndrives of similar size, particularly when the motor is left on the outboard. The sterndrive will be a little heavier, but the tilt-up feature of the drive unit simplifies off-and-on handling as well as highway carrying. With either type of boat you'll need a suitable trailer—one that's big enough, even oversize, and preferably convenient for launching and reloading.—J. A. Emswett.