

I Hunted With the Shah

by

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I thought I knew a thing or two about wild sheep and goats, but that was before I was a guest of Iran's imperial household



Prince Abdorreza (left) with Klein and Klein's first ibex. The author is one of two Texans who hunted in Africa with Jack O'Connor. (See "The Black Band," this issue)

Before February of this year I thought, deep down in my heart, that I was quite a sheep hunter. I started chasing wild sheep over the peaks and through the canyons of Wyoming almost 30 years ago, and since then I've hunted them in Alberta, British Columbia, Idaho, the Yukon, and in the Mexican states of Sonora and Lower California.

As a result, the north wall of my den is covered with 11 sheep trophies, representing six different species. Only a dozen or so big-game hunters have shot all four sorts of North American wild sheep—bighorn, Stone, Dall, and desert. Wasn't I one of the lucky ones? Besides, I had specimens of all four sorts with curls over 40 inches—something

no other sheep hunter has, so far as I know. Yes, I considered myself quite a sheep hunter.

Then I went to Iran.

There I ran into two real, honest-to-goodness sheep hunters. They're both young, tough, wiry, have lots of stamina, and can shoot the eye out of a cruising buzzard—the left eye, if you insist. They seem to know instinctively what a sheep is going to do, and why, and they scramble over fabulously rough country as easily as do those crazy Iranian sheep. I thought I was a fair hand with a rifle, but those two make shots with open iron sights that I'd be proud to make with a scope and a dead rest.

On a horse I look like a sack of potatoes lashed on with



Lunch afield on a Persian rug. Klein, hatless and in borrowed clothes, with Prince (right), aides

a squaw hitch that's slipping. Those two sheep-hunting friends of mine think nothing of jumping aboard beautiful, wild-eyed Arabian stallions and traveling at a dead gallop over country where I'd pick my way with caution even on foot.

One of these paragons is His Imperial Majesty Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi of Iran, and the other is his brother, His Imperial Highness Prince Abdorrezza Pahlavi. I hunted with them near the capital city of Tehran for a couple of weeks last February.

How I happened to hunt sheep on the Iranian royal preserves as guest of the Prince and as a boarder at the imperial palace takes a bit of explaining.

Prince Abdorrezza became acquainted with *OUTDOOR LIFE* when he was a student at Harvard. Because he's a great hunter, he struck up a correspondence with Jack O'Connor, and when the Prince learned that Jack and I were planning an African safari in the summer of 1953, he invited us to visit him on the way back and take a whirl at Iranian sheep.

About that time, however, an old man by the name of Mossadegh had the political situation in Iran in quite a dither, so Jack and I thought it best to uninvite ourselves.

But things calmed down, and last November when Prince Abdorrezza learned that I was going to go to India this spring, he reinvented me to stop off and see what sort of sheep are to be found in the Middle East's ancient mountains.

Perhaps the fact that I landed in Tehran on February 13 had something to do with it. Anyway, the only luck "Lucky" Klein had was bad. I found that I'd chosen the only two weeks in the entire year when the weather there can be counted on to be miserable. It rained, sleeted, snowed, and drizzled, and the high peaks were fogged in almost continuously. Time and time again when the Prince and I were hunting sheep or ibex, great clouds, dank and chill, enfolded us like blankets and brought an end to our stalks. Sometimes the fog was so dense we had to sit down and wait for it to clear before we could find our horses.

The weather wasn't all. Because I was covering a lot of

territory, I'd shipped two of my rifles—a .300 Weatherby Magnum and a 7 mm. ditto—along with my binoculars, hunting clothes, and spotting scope via air freight to the imperial palace. I took great pains to see that the equipment left my home in Dallas, Texas, in plenty of time, and went to the trouble of finding out when the shipment left New York. But I hadn't counted on Dutch regulations.

I flew across the Atlantic, but when I got to Amsterdam I had a hunch all wasn't well. I checked on my air-freight shipment, and was politely informed that the taking of rifles and ammunition on passenger planes is strictly verboten. I shouldn't worry, the officials assured me, since a freighter plane would transport my stuff to Tehran in a day or two.

"Could I split the shipment and take my hunting clothes with me and let my guns

and ammunition follow on the freighter?" I wanted to know.

Polite reply: "No, we're terribly sorry. But your paraphernalia will arrive in Tehran on Tuesday." The trouble was they didn't tell me which Tuesday.

You guessed it. The shipment arrived in Tehran in time for me to use it on the very last day of my stay there.

Meantime I had to go hunting, and I couldn't very well go in my Sunday suit. By some happy chance I had one suit of long underwear with me, but that wasn't enough. I tried to buy some hunting clothes and boots in Tehran, but, alas, most of the sturdy Iranian males are smaller in stature than we are in Texas. The best I could do was rustle up a pair of size 36 trousers into which I tried to squeeze my 38 waist, and a pair of "waterproof" shoes which shed moisture like a blotter. After two days of hunting with cold, wet feet and the top button of my trousers



Prince with his world-record red sheep shot in Iran's Elburz Mountains in 1952 at 12,500 feet. Horn length, 34½ inches

undone, I knew I'd have to do something pronto.

That night I met John Barry, Jack O'Connor's brother-in-law, who is an American engineer with Morrison-Knutson, a firm that is building a dam for the Iranian government. He and I were staying at the Park Hotel (European style), and John kindly loaned me a suit of long underwear, a wool shirt, and a pull-over sweater. I borrowed some wool pants from a member of the Shah's cabinet, an amply built fellow with a 38-inch middle. But it was Manuchehr Riahi, Iranian industrialist and one of the Prince's hunting companions, who really saved my life. He wears size 10 shoes, and he generously loaned me an excellent pair of European-made boots. Prince Abdorrezza contributed a jacket and a cap, his pet 8 mm. Mauser, and his 6 x 30 binoculars. I felt like a poor neglected orphan dressed and fitted out by a few kind relations.

Two days later—after I'd missed my first sheep—I met Alex Firouz, a handsome young Iranian and an ardent sheep hunter who works for John Barry. He loaned me his Model 70 Winchester .30/06 which was equipped with a Weaver K-4 scope on a Pachmayr mount, and with it he gave me a supply of Winchester cartridges with 180-grain Silvertip bullets. I was really missing my .300 Weatherby Magnum which I've carried all over North America and Africa. My .30/06-admiring friends won't like me for this, but after using a .300 Weatherby, which pushes a 180-grain bullet at a muzzle velocity of 3,400 foot seconds, a .30/06 with a similar bullet at 2,700 foot seconds seems just about a cut above a bow and arrow.

Prince Abdorrezza, a handsome young man in his late 20's, is a gun nut with a capital G. He owns a battery of de luxe British and European arms and has a wonderful collection of African and Asiatic trophies. He hunted some in South



The ruler of Iran (left) outside his field tent with the Prince, his brother. Table set for lunch

Africa when he accompanied his father, the late Reza Khan, following the latter's abdication in 1941.

Last summer Prince Abdorrezza shot 12 tigers and scores of other game in India. His trophy room is a beauty. During my stay in Iran the Prince and I had a lot of fun swapping hunting yarns and exchanging information. I was bound for India, so I pumped him about conditions there. He wants to make a North American hunt next year and is planning an East Africa safari next summer. Since I've hunted in both places, I was able to give him plenty of dope.

The Prince also has a beautiful Princess, an auburn-haired, dark-eyed, olive-skinned girl of great charm and poise, and together they make the perfect host and hostess.

Hunting with a prince in a royal preserve is an experience. Every morning at 5 o'clock. (continued on page 90)



Among Iran's wide variety of game are mountain bears, like this one, downed by the Prince last May in the lofty western peaks



Another princely prize—a marel, or red deer. Klein wants to go back to take a crack at trophies like this

HUNT WITH THE SHAH

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the imperial car would call for me at the hotel. Dressed in my weird clothing, I'd take off with my borrowed rifle and have breakfast with the Prince at the palace. By hunting tradition we should have eaten in the imperial kitchens, but we didn't. We ate in state and in splendor, waited on by soft-footed and sleepy-eyed attendants.

By the time we got to the preserves about 12 miles out of Tehran, it would be daylight. It would also be cold and wet. Tehran itself is situated at an elevation of 3,800 feet, but the Elburz range of mountains shoots up like a great wall and overhangs the city. One of its peaks towers over 18,500 feet—quite a hill in any man's country. The mountains reminded me of the great summits along the east coast of the Mexican state of Lower California,

where I did a lot of prowling for desert bighorns a couple of years ago. It's rough, tough, and rugged—a mass of decomposed granite which lets you take one step forward and drops you back two.

Around the royal stables, where we left the car and met the guides with our horses, it would be fairly dry, but snowline was at about 9,000 feet, and the areas between would be deep in mud. The snow was three to four feet deep; even now my feet get cold when I think about it.

On our first day out the Prince and I mounted our horses and skirted the mountains to get to a spot where we could make the rest of our climb afoot. We both had handsome and peppy Arabian stallions, but I would have traded mine anyday for any one of those cold-blooded, cautious, and discouraged plugs I've ridden up and down the Canadian Rockies. I'm a guy who likes plenty of Western saddle with a horn to hang onto, but in Iran we rode English saddles about as big as a buckwheat pancake. I like a calm, reflective horse; mine zipped along like a rocket.

When the going became so rough that even our jet-assisted mounts couldn't make it, we turned our horses over to the grooms and took off up the ridge on foot with our guides. I might add that the Prince needs a guide for Iranian sheep hunting about as much as Jane Russell needs falsies, but when you're a prince, apparently, you have to live up to expectations and surround yourself with aides.

We'd climbed perhaps half an hour when His Imperial Highness poked his head over a rock to look around a bend in the canyon, then quickly withdrew it.

"Five rams," he whispered to me. "None worth shooting, but we don't want to frighten them. They might run and scare others. One is a five-year-old, the others are four."

How could he know all that with just one look through 7X binoculars? I've hunted with some of the best guides in North America, but I've yet to meet anyone who can judge sheep as quickly and as accurately as Prince Abdorreza. I'll give an Oklahoma guarantee that when he makes his North American hunt, he will astonish his guides. They'll have a rough time keeping up with him too.

Taking my borrowed binoculars, I cautiously peeked around the rock and saw my first Asiatic sheep. Three were lying down on a shale slide about 250 yards away, and two were standing. The Elburz mountain sheep are mouflon, small, wild creatures which can run like antelope, climb like goats, dodge like jackrabbits, and bounce like tennis balls. Our domestic sheep are supposed to be descended from them. The first ones I saw near Tehran are probably what scientists call *Ovis orientalis erakini*. They are larger than the Sardinian mouflon, which have been transplanted to Texas and which I have hunted, but they are relatively small. I'd guess the average ram would field dress around 125 pounds, and those

I saw would probably go from 110 to 130 pounds. They are tannish red and have black ruffs, and some older rams develop white saddles.

Without disturbing the group, the Prince and I cut around the other side of the ridge and climbed through mud and over slick rocks clear to the snowline to see what else we could find in that area.

What we found, among other things, was the first bunch of ibex I'd ever seen. And, my friends, a big ibex is some trophy. This Persian wild goat is considered to be the ancestor of our domestic goat, just as the mouflon is the great-great-grandfather of our domestic sheep. The ibex hillies we saw stood about three feet high at the shoulder and would dress out at from 150 to 175 pounds. Some older ones get even heavier. They are beige-brown, bulky, shaggy-looking from a distance, and they can climb places where our North American wild sheep would break their necks.

We looked over many sheep and quite a few ibex that day, but my jinx followed us. The rams that were below the snowline were young—three, four, and a few five-year-olds. The older boys with trophy horns—seven to 10-year-olds—were high on barren ridges where the wind had swept off the snow. We climbed to those levels time and again only to have the fog close in or to have a snowstorm start. Once we were within 400 yards of seven busters, two with great white saddles, and if I'd been carrying my .300 Weatherby I'm sure I could have picked off one or both of them without much trouble. But all I had was the Prince's 8 mm. with iron sights, and a shot that long was out of the question.

We decided to keep on around the ridge, stalk closer, and try to get a shot from about 250 yards, but no go. We hadn't gone 100 yards when the great rams either saw us or got our wind and took off. We were a long way from the car, and I was tired, cold, hungry, discouraged, and still mad at the polite ones in Amsterdam. The Prince never seemed to get tired, cold, or hungry. He could go all day and all night and still be sharp, but perhaps the slight difference of about 25 years in our ages had something to do with that.

Along about the third day I wondered how much longer I could go without getting a shot at something. We'd been following a single ram and a ewe for hours, first on horseback, then afoot, again on horseback. The ram wasn't big, only five years old according to the Prince. We climbed to within 250 yards of him and I took as careful an aim as I could over open sights, and squeezed. All I did was nick a rock just under the ram's chest. I'd forgotten that my borrowed 8 mm. was sighted in for only 100 yards.

On the way back we stalked another group of small rams and got to within 50 yards of a little three-year-old, but I couldn't bring myself to pull the trigger on him. The native guides thought I'd lost my marbles because their idea is to shoot anything. What

they're interested in is meat; you can't eat horns, they tell you.

Our next hunting was done in a raw, rugged mountain range a day's drive south and west of Tehran. There was less snow there, and Prince Abdorreza's scouts reported many sheep and ibex.

We stayed at the home of a local nobleman. Until you go visiting in Iran with the Prince, you don't know what it is to be entertained. Following ancient Persian custom, villagers always attempt to cut a sheep's throat in front of the Prince's car whenever he enters a town. Custom also demands that before he enters a house an egg must be dropped and broken on the floor in front of him. Whenever possible the Prince tried to avoid receiving these honors, but sometimes it was too late.

We stayed in the best rooms in the nobleman's house. The floors were covered with handsome Persian rugs, and we were surrounded by silver bowls full of fruit, nuts, candy, and cookies. Iranian cooking, incidentally, is delicious—mostly chicken, goat, or mutton served with rice, and heavily spiced. Our host and his servants watched us like hawks. If we didn't eat heartily of a certain dish, the likelihood was it would never be served again.

Next day our host rounded up all his retainers for an ibex drive. My Persian guide and I stationed ourselves behind a pile of rocks on the side of a big mountain, while the Prince and another guide dug in about 400 yards to our left.

I listened intently to the noise of the drivers working in canyons and ridges in front of us. Ibex travel so quietly and cautiously that neither the guide nor I saw or heard a small herd until one of the animals dislodged a stone not 50 yards to my right. I picked out the largest and let him have it, and I popped another as the group dashed over the skyline behind us. Both my rams were only three-year-olds, but though my guide spoke no English he somehow made me understand I was now a full-fledged ibex hunter.

We tried another drive in the mountains the following day. About the time we were stationed on the crest of a ridge, after rough horsebacking on some scrawny ponies (we didn't have the royal family's Arabian thoroughbreds with us), it started blowing and snowing. We couldn't see 10 feet in any direction, though we heard sheep and ibex passing us on both sides. Some sounded so close I could have hit them with a pebble, I'm sure, but all I saw was a couple of shadowy forms.

Next day we tried a third ibex drive, and this time I was treated to the sight of a string of about 40 old billies tearing down a rocky ledge and finally silhouetting themselves above the skyline, crowded close, their curving, back-swept horns a tangle against the troubled sky. Six or seven of the heads in the mob must have had horns 48 to 50 inches long, but the group was a good half mile away. If it hadn't started snowing again the Prince and I probably could have made a stalk and

closed in on one or two of those white-collared old-timers. As it was, we had to give up and go back to the car.

Since we seemed to be badly snake-bit on ibex, we tried a sheep drive the following morning. Again I was stationed with a guide behind a pile of rocks in a dip in the sheep mountain, and we hadn't been there 10 minutes when a five-year-old ram showed within 300 yards. I hated to shoot so early in the drive, and I had hopes that an even better one would come by, but he turned out to be the best ram I had any chance at during the whole trip. I passed him up, and I'm not through kicking myself yet.

When we got back to Tehran we took another whirl around the royal preserve. His Imperial Majesty Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi himself went out with us the last day.

By this time my rifles, binoculars, and kit had come, along with a .300 Weatherby Magnum which I'd brought over as a gift for the Prince. It was a fancy piece, if I do say so, with some fine engraving, gold-plated trigger guard and floorplate, and pearl inlays on the stock. When His Imperial Highness saw it he gasped and shook his head. "This rifle is exquisite," he said. "It could not have come from a gun factory. It must have come from a jewelry store."

I thought things were de luxe when I hunted with the Prince alone. The servants would lay a rug on the ground and we would be served luncheon in courses. With His Imperial Majesty along, however, everything was ultra. A tent was erected for lunch. We ate from a table, and sat on plush chairs. The boys even erected a fancy Chic Sale.

The Shah is a grand hunting companion. He's a great conversationalist (we took three hours for lunch), an ardent hunter, a crack shot, a wonderful skier, and a superb horseman. In addition, he pilots his own airplane and loves high-powered automobiles, which he drives himself. As a horseman, he rides as though he had been born in the saddle. Several times I watched him gallop along the slope of a muddy, rocky hill, then slide to a stop, leap off, and kill a running ram offhand at from 250 to 300 yards with an open-sighted 7 x 57 mm. rifle. What the Shah couldn't do with that Mauser wasn't worth doing.

That last day we had a substantial part of the Iranian army along to drive for us. The men are tough-looking but friendly, well mounted, and as recklessly skillful on horseback as their rulers. The Shah, the Prince, and I climbed up a long ridge and got set behind a pile of rocks. Then about 200 soldiers on foot took the high part of the ridge and half as many horsemen worked the lower slopes. Everyone was allowed to shoot, and when sheep tried to turn back through the drivers, rifles and Tommy guns popped merrily. The drivers shot and killed eight sheep and three striped hyenas—which looked just like the African ones I saw in Kenya on the Somaliland border in 1933—and they

wounded a leopard which, unfortunately, we never were able to find.

For that final day I had my own 7 mm. Weatherby Magnum, as well as my favorite 9 x 35 Bausch & Lomb binoculars. I also had my own comfortable clothes.

But the net result was only two three-year-old rams, little better than those I'd previously taken, and a fairly large six-year-old which the Shah wounded at 300 yards after a long gallop on horseback and which the Prince finally ran down on foot.

However, I saw a sight I'll never forget, and it's going to take me back to Iran as sure as death and taxes.

The three of us were crouched behind a pile of rocks on a lofty ridge when a bunch of at least 200 rams that were fleeing from the drivers came by on the opposite crest not 600 yards away. When I say 200 rams I mean 200. I've never seen anything like it. Some were 10, 11, and 12-year-olds, the Prince told me. We could have shot sheep out of that herd, but the frightened animals were so closely bunched it would have been simply flock-shooting. We watched them pick their way down the ridge, but no one fired a shot.

Suddenly the Shah took hold of my elbow. "That last one," he said, pointing. "There's your trophy ram."

The sheep was an odd one, calm, cautious, furtive. He trotted along through the rocks, looking back now and then toward the drivers, his big horns almost completing a circle under his chin. Then he jumped on a rock and stood there. Through those crystal-clear binoculars of mine his head looked tremendous, and for a moment I thought of taking a pop at him. But he jumped down and trotted around a boulder. I never saw him again.

"Too bad," said the Shah. "I wish you could have taken him with you to America. We'll save him for you, and when you come back next fall he will be waiting."

I'll be going back all right. Iran is the greatest country for sheep and goats I've ever seen. Besides the two kinds of mouflon I saw, it has the shapoorial, a wild sheep with horns up to 40 inches long and with a great white ruff. The Prince killed one in eastern Iran last fall that had horns measuring almost 39 inches.

Iran also has another species of sheep that apparently belong to the argali family, and another kind of goat called the pasang. It has wild boars as big as small trucks, dainty little gazelles, a few long-haired leopards and tigers much like those found in Manchuria, a red deer known as the maral, striped hyenas, mountain bears, and upland birds and waterfowl in great abundance. In my estimation Iran is one of the finest hunting countries of the world, and in addition it has some of the nicest people.

But when I go back I'm going to have a bit of excess baggage. It will include a big Western saddle, a .300 Weatherby, size 10 boots, and some size 38 hunting trousers. No more of that poor-orphan stuff for me. 194 199