

Ibex
October 13, 2013 New Mexico

Matthew 19:26

Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”



I was exhausted: physically and mentally. My long-time hunting partner and friend, Jason, and I had just wrapped up a grueling all-day grid-search for a bull elk I had hit the night before. I had never hit an animal and not recovered it and our inability to pick up a blood trail weighed heavily on my conscience. We had finally stumbled across my arrow at the end of the day and solved the riddle: only 2-3" of penetration and no blood – a sure sign of a high shoulder blade hit; a flesh wound that would no more irritate the huge bull than a rival's antler tine jabbing him in the heat of battle. He would live.

But the damage to my psyche had been done: for nearly 24-hours I believed that I was responsible for an unrecovered animal and questioned whether I should continue to bowhunt. My spare time was at a premium, my practice sessions never seemed sufficient. Historically I have been fairly successful at closing the distance on game, but in many cases my nerves got the best of me and I have some epic misses to my credit. Now, worn out and having assumed for hours that I had wounded and lost an animal, it had all caught up to me.

True the high hit had largely resulted from a rangefinder on the fritz that left me guesstimating yardage. After pacing things off, it turned out I had aimed for farther than the bull had actually been standing, which accounted for the high impact. But after missing two bulls due to prior guesstimating, the reality had settled in that the lofty dream of notching any combination of elk, deer and bear tags in my pocket had fallen miserably short. In fact neither Jason nor I filled any of the 3 and 5-tags we held, respectively, for various species. Critters 8: Bowhunters 0 - in short, I was depressed.

Jason tried to buoy my spirits by noting that at least we now knew the reason we hadn't found the bull. And that under the circumstances we did everything we could do to ensure he wasn't lying dead somewhere with the meat going to waste. Everything a trusted hunting partner would do to help view the glass as half-full instead of half-empty as my analytical engineering mind tended to do.

I recall him saying "Who knows, you could have a great ibex hunt next month!" Sure, and maybe I'd stumble across a leprechaun's chest of gold and shoot a unicorn too: I

had pursued ibex with my bow on 3-previous occasions over the past decade totaling more than 20-days in the field and rarely gotten within archery range, let alone killed one. There are many reasons that the harvest success for archers hovers in the 1-2% range for these monarchs of the mountain. Ibex have incredible eyesight, live in extremely rugged terrain, and it is difficult to get within rifle range of these critters, let alone cut the yardage to the low double-digits needed for a successful bow shot.

Not too long after our elk hunt was over I received a text from another good friend who was pursuing the mighty wapiti on his own hunt. His tone indicated that he was tired, wet and beginning to think he might not seal the deal. I recalled how I had felt on my own elk hunt, and it gnawed at me that I had given up a couple of days early. I encouraged Brandon to keep pushing. It's a long off-season, and I still kicked myself for not going back down and hunting 2-more days for elk. To his credit, Brandon persevered and killed a whopper bull on the last day – his biggest by far, which erased all the pain and misery he had been going through at the time.

Some of you may recall that I finished my female/immature (F/IM) ibex population control story last February with "To be continued..." I hoped that by killing 2 nannies with rifle I might draw one of the incentive trophy ibex tags offered by NM Game & Fish. Alas, that did not come to pass, but I was blessed with an archery tag through the standard drawing process.

Although I looked forward to my ibex hunt, deep down I believed it impossible to tag one with archery tackle and didn't hold much hope of adding any meat to the family freezer. I joked that I was counting on our daughter to feed us this winter, after failing to bring home the bacon after a week's pursuit of elk, deer and bears.

As the 2-week season approached, my available hunting time began to diminish; eaten away by various activities and work-related conflicts that I couldn't get out of. Before I knew it, all I could devote would be one 5-day stint and a follow-up final 3-day hail Mary. And most of these days would have to be negative vacation or leave without pay!

I squeezed in one scouting trip in late September and found the Florida Mountains to be cloaked in greenery, with nearly every drainage flowing with water. It was apparent that the area had been pounded with rain, which was good for the wildlife. It also became apparent that all that vegetation made hiking a little trickier, as it concealed treacherous footing and buzz-tailed snakes!



The Floridas looked like a jungle compared to my previous visits!



Wet and green

During my scouting trip I glassed several ibex at various distances, so I held hope for action during the upcoming October season.



Some closer...



Some farther...

Despite my abbreviated schedule, I vowed to give it my all and make the best of it. When the time came, as has become typical in recent years, I pointed my trusty Tacoma southward much later than planned and at 9pm began the 4-hour drive to base camp. With bleary eyes I finally parked, tossed my gear onto the ground and crashed in the bed of my truck prior to shouldering my bivy gear and marching upward at first light.



Sunrise in southern NM

Although ascending near vertical terrain is never completely enjoyable, hiking in the cool of the day and watching the sun rise was soothing to my spirit. Each footstep brought me closer to my goal and eventually I reached my predetermined campsite and dropped my bivy gear. Knowing I might drag back to my tent after dark, I set camp and organized everything before getting serious about glassing for ibex.



My golden tent matched the yellow wildflowers

I carefully peered over the first ridge next to camp and nearly jumped out of my socks – two large billies had been feeding just out of sight within the length of a football field while I had been setting up spike camp! But my excitement was short lived as they immediately turned away and made a beeline for higher ground. I had been careful to move slowly and glass from behind bushes, but I think the wind had betrayed me. They weren't overly spooked, but I would never catch them as they traversed the rugged terrain with ease. All I could do was appreciate them, snap photos and move on.



"Shooters" near camp!

Throughout the day I glassed ibex here and there, but well out of bow range. Heck, most were in areas that would have taken me hours to reach. The mountain range is deceiving. The map may suggest the next ridge as being, say "only" one half mile away, but instead of taking less than 5-minutes at my running pace, it might take an hour to cover the distance. The increased vegetation made travel more difficult than usual; clawing at boots, pants, hiking pole and backpack. It also covered loose rocks and unstable footing. My travel was a combination of climbing, walking, stumbling, and tripping and must have looked more like a semi-controlled zombie-like shamble than the surefooted grace with which ibex covered terrain even more difficult than I would consider.

Eventually I spied a band of billies in an approachable location below and I picked my way down to a vantage point just above them. It was difficult to keep track of their location because the rocky cliffs were too steep to peer over in most cases. I was finally able to get close to the impressive group. My rangefinder read 60-yards, angle compensated, which meant that if I were to shoot I should aim with my 60-yard pin. However, they were steeply downward and I recognized that the actual distance was more like 80+ yards, meaning accuracy would be that of 80+. As a kicker, the wind was howling, as is common in the Floridas, and I could barely stand at the cusp of the cliff above them. There was no way I could hold my bow steady or predict what my arrow might do in that wind. They eventually moved farther away and once again all I could do was observe and snap photos. Shooting one of these beasts was surely impossible!



Impressive beasts!

The band alternately fed and bedded, each move taking them farther and farther away from me. I couldn't fathom their thinking, and their travel route appeared entirely unpredictable. Finally they disappeared from view and I reluctantly retraced my circuitous route back to bivy camp. It has been my experience that getting within rifle range of ibex does not come easily, so to have tasted an archery range encounter without a shot opportunity was bittersweet. I wondered if I would have another chance. Adding insult to injury, they had led me nearly halfway down the mountain. I considered continuing down and sleeping at the truck instead of climbing back up that evening, but since I would need to climb sooner or later, I decided to get it over with.

My first day on the mountain had been a success and I slept well. Sunrise was beautiful, although chilly. I shivered as I ate breakfast, thankful that I had thrown my Sitka Kelvin Lite Jacket in almost as an afterthought. It provided lightweight warmth every evening and morning; plus, made for a great pillow!



Sunrise was breathtaking and reminded me of Luke 12:26-27 - And he said to His disciples "If then you cannot do even a very little thing, why do you worry about other matters? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; but I tell you, not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these."



Fueling up with scrambled eggs in preparation for another long day

Although I have always heard rumors that the range is home to numbers of mountain lions, the only big game animals I have ever seen in the Floridas are ibex. However, numerous other species are prevalent. Throughout my travel, in addition to amazing

vistas, I was continually awed and entertained (or surprised) by: songbirds, squirrels, insects, golden eagles, falcons, lizards, tarantulas and rattlesnakes!



Squirrel – it's what's for dinner LOL



Lizards abounded



Dark butterflies enjoyed flower nectar



Good reason to zip the tent closed!



Being above or at eye-level with falcons was amazing!



Crazy caterpillar



Who dreamed up the colors to paint these grasshoppers, anyway?!



Trying to photograph one of these hummers is nearly as difficult as getting within archery range of an ibex!



Most of the rattlesnakes I saw were greenish and small, which I believe are Rock Rattlesnakes. Thankfully without exception they all buzzed a warning while I was far away, and tried to avoid me by crawling under rocks or into holes. I simply gave them wide berth and thanked God for giving them a built-in warning system.



I found a couple of Prairie Rattlesnakes near some wet areas down low. They seemed to be lurking in wait for birds or other small animals to come for a drink and didn't move a muscle when I observed them.



Breathtaking



I challenge any artist to outdo God's handiwork - even my photos can't do it justice

One morning I spotted a single snoozing billy "only" 800-yards from camp, in a stalkable location. Without wings that distance would take me nearly an hour to traverse, but I was willing give it a try. I spotted a handful of nannies near the halfway point. They were above me in a location that would be impossible to pass without spooking them. I reasoned that they would retreat higher on the mountain when pushed, so I eased into view to nudge them away without alerting the billy that was still sunning himself two drainages away and at my elevation. Alas, as ibex tend to do, the nannies didn't go anywhere close to where I anticipated. Instead they angled down, crossed both drainages and blew right past the billy, taking him who knows where. Curses...foiled again. This pursuit continued to be more than just challenging – more like impossible!



"Approachable" billy: blown out by unpredictable nannies.

Although I was able to position myself within 100-150-yards of ibex on a few other occasions, either they moved away on their own, or a careless kick of a loose rock on my part was enough to spook them.

After several days of this madness I started wearing down and began to break down mentally. Text messages to my wife and close friends were telling:

- I dream of this hunt for years, but now I'm here it's so hard & seems impossible.
- I had forgotten how tough to stalk here. Such noisy rocks & vegetation. I've been 100-200 yds of really nice ones but couldn't close.
- Pretty hot on mountain. I have enough water for 1 more day up here, then will have to reassess. (Note: with some suffering I managed to squeeze 2-more days out of my water supply from that point)
- Crazy hot.
- Low on water. Enough for dinner & morning then must hike down tomorrow.

Positive responses from my lovely wife and bowhunting brethren made a HUGE difference in my attitude and the outcome of my hunt:

- Laurie: "Well just know the experience is what really matters. I love you."
- Dave: "Hang tough brother. You can do it! Don't leave anything on the table, no regrets."
- Brandon: "You can get it done. It's going to happen. Keep at it! Do it!!"

I tried to feed off of their encouragement and focus on the challenge: honestly most people couldn't do this. On our elk hunt Jason waxed how truly getting away from it all is a rare treat to be enjoyed to the fullest. His voice echoed in my mind to make the most of every bit of the experience. I gradually made the mental shift from feeling pressure to succeed to relishing the opportunity and enjoying the journey.



No fear

On the last full day of my first outing I spotted a good billy in a location I had been to before. I knew I could circle behind the rocky ridge he was on and put the sneak on him. It would take over an hour for to get into position, but at least I would be able to keep tabs on him for half that journey. With each peek to check on him, my confidence grew – I might just pull this one off!



Lone billy that I knew how to approach!

Soon it was time to shed my pack, nock an arrow, and put the final sneak to the last position I had seen the ibex. I crept forward slowly one step at a time and the end of the rocky outcrop drew closer and closer. He had to be nearby. As I approached the end of the knoll I questioned if he had wandered off.

Suddenly horns popped into view at less than 10-yards away! Yikes, this felt TOO close. The wind had died and I could have heard a pin drop. I was suddenly aware of the slightest noises: my heart thumping, boots creaking and clothing swishing. Surely even the tiniest sound would be enough to send him rocketing over the edge.

After my initial shock, I took a moment to evaluate things, and couldn't envision the scenario coming to fruition. His body was completely obscured by rocks and unless he moved to expose himself without seeing me at the same time, a shot would be impossible. I couldn't figure out any way to make things work, so simply stood ready.

Eventually, as I suspected, he raised his head above the rocks. He stared my way and recognized something out of place, even though only my upper torso was in view. After a 30-second stare-down, he snorted and dropped away. I rushed to the edge of the cliff and saw him below. I quickly ranged him at 27-yards (nearly straight down), but before I could finish drawing my bow, he scrambled out of sight. I glimpsed him once more far below out of range. I wanted to cry, scream and burst! I slumped to the ground in dejection. I had finally gotten into bow range, closer than I had ever been to an ibex, yet still hadn't gotten a shot. Surely this madness was impossible!

I retreated to my pack to lick my wounds and drown my sorrows with some water, mountain lion jerky, and nuts. Pretty meager rations, but after refueling I took heart in the success of having gotten so close to an unaware animal, and began to glass again.

As my binos passed over a particular rocky crag I had noted before, nearly a world away as measured in effort and boot leather, once again I found ibex perched on and around it. From my location it would be nearly impossible to reach, but I vowed to try to figure out a route there on my return trip.



Ibex seemed to frequent this rocky outcrop

Unless something happened the following morning, I would be forced to retreat to the truck for water. I had already rationed the precious liquid and stretched an extra day out

of my supply: there was no way I could stay longer. I told myself I had to find a way to get close to the rocky outcrop where those ibex were frequenting!

That evening I returned to camp early, having no other options except to study far away ibex. I felt guilty for sitting in camp with nearly an hour of daylight left, but couldn't locate any animals to go after, so I relaxed and enjoyed my last evening on the mountain.

From camp I again glassed the familiar outcrop and the view from my different perspective nearly took my breath away.



What a sight!

The next morning I spotted some ibex below that might be accessible along my downward route, so I packed camp and began dropping elevation. Once again I was able to get close enough for photos, but I couldn't get close enough for a shot - impossible!



Ibex traverse crazy terrain with ease

I arrived at my truck in the late afternoon, having slurped my last swallow of water an hour before. It was 85-degrees and the sun beat down like a heat lamp. I greedily sucked down a bottle of tepid water from the truck and took a solar shower before pointing the old Tacoma for home. I had been within range of ibex twice in 5-days of hard hunting. Neither time had resulted in a shot opportunity. I had only a maximum of

3-days to hunt the following week. Odds were slim to nil at best...again, it seemed impossible.

After squaring things away at work and home, it was time to hit the road for my final assault. My days back in civilization had allowed me to recover and I headed out in the late afternoon feeling refreshed and eager to finish strong.

In repeat fashion I parked and slept in the bed of my truck for a few hours before dragging out and beginning my ascent as the sky lightened.

Knowing that I would only be out for a few days, I took only the bare minimum. I lightened my load by forgoing my cook stove and dehydrated meals and carried only Hammer bars, jerky, nuts, and water, plus Genesis Pure's powdered Energy & Hydration for an added boost. With no chance of rain, I even considered leaving my tent behind, but ultimately decided the 2-pounds were worth it, for which I was later thankful.

My climb was geared toward reaching the stony ibex playground where I had observed many hanging out over the previous week. The farther I climbed, the steeper the terrain became, and I worried about not finding an area level enough to pitch my bivy tent.

Finally, as the rock knob loomed above, I found a semi-level spot near a large bush that provided the potential for sleep without rolling down the mountain. I cached my sleeping gear and extra water and continued up. Later I used a sharp rock to cut a bench into the hillside just large enough for my tent.



Watch that first step out of the tent – it's a doozie!

As I neared my destination I evaluated ambush locations. With only scattered brush and rocks, it would be tough to find a spot that provided protection from sharp eyes above within a reasonable shot distance. I evaluated my options and finally chose a small alcove tucked behind a tree and large boulder at the base of the outcrop. I carefully cleared my footing of loose rocks, dead sticks and leaf litter and then positioned a rounded stone to sit on.

From my seated position I evaluated shot angles and carefully trimmed branches from various bushes to open up shooting lanes that ranged between 20 and 45-yards. Lastly, and what ultimately was most important, I recognized that any ibex approaching directly around the boulder I was behind would appear head-on, offering no shot and setting me

up to be busted. I piled some brush, branches and yucca leaves in front of me in hopes of avoiding that situation.

By 10am I was settled in to wait, over 4-hours since leaving my rig far below. My vantage point allowed me to peek over the boulder and glass a large area, which provided entertainment and afforded me the opportunity to spot ibex approaching from below in advance. I would be unable to see any ibex coming from above. During my sit I alternately read and scanned for ibex.

Throughout the day I watched a group of nannies slowly making their way toward my hideout and vowed to shoot anything that came within range: big or small, taking ANY ibex with a bow is a real accomplishment. As I tracked their wary progress, I was amazed at the extent to which they took care to carefully study their surroundings as they traveled, often standing alert for 15-30 minutes at a time before moving a mere dozen yards and then repeating their vigilance. It took the batch of nannies over 4-hours to travel just 300-yards. It is no wonder that they usually see us before we see them!



Incredibly wary

From out of nowhere a bachelor group of ibex came into view below me and I watched them alternately feed, bed, cavort and posture as they worked their way across the hillside. I held hope that they would head my way, but instead they meandered with no discernible pattern and eventually disappeared into a ravine far below. They were amazing to watch. One moment I could see 1 or 2 animals, and then out of nowhere others would appear until I counted a total of 11. Then they would disappear entirely. I could not believe that nearly a dozen animals could hide in seemingly open terrain. All the while one or more animals were on constant vigil while the others fed or bedded, rocking their heads while they snoozed. They are tough critters to sneak up on. I wondered how many times I had unwittingly spooked ibex without even seeing them, or passed right by ibex that weren't visible below overhangs or tucked away in crevices.



If only these bachelors would head my way!

This question was addressed later that afternoon when I glassed a hunter on an adjacent ridge. Less than 200-yards below him I could see a handful of billies feeding, and I envisioned him stalking down and killing one. Instead, he glassed their way, and then moved on, obviously unable to see them just the short distance below!

Later another hunter popped into view well below my location on a small ridge over which just minutes earlier the bachelor group of billies had fed out of my sight. The hunter scanned with binos and then dropped back behind the ridge. I was certain that he would be in a great position to intercept the billies and watched carefully for the group to bust out of the ravine when he either spooked them or shot one. As I watched, another group totaling over 20-animals; nannies, young billies and one large, white, mature billy, cautiously came into view. After scanning for danger, they cavorted down the very ridge where I had seen the hunter. The lucky guy seemed to be positioned between two groups of ibex, totaling over two dozen animals! Yet to my amazement the ibex passed the spot where I had seen him and it was apparent that either he was no longer there or he didn't see them, because none of the animals showed alarm or any indication that a hunter was nearby.

As I watched the large group, my eyes were drawn to the largest billy. During the winter nearly all of the billies have a whitish coat with striking dark markings, but their summer coats are much more tan or cream colored. This billy was the whitest of any I had seen over the past 10-days. He moved with a barely discernible limp; an injury to his left rear leg occasionally caused him to move both rear legs together, and sometimes when he stopped to feed he would lift that leg off the ground. It didn't seem to slow him down much, as he still jumped, and climbed up and down over insane obstacles just like the rest of his group. Coupled with his light coloration, the limp made him distinctive and easily identifiable. At the time I thought he might have been hit with an errant arrow, although I could see no indication of a fresh wound. This group also appeared to roam with no rhyme or reason, and eventually vanished over a knob far below heading away from me.



Large white billy with a limp

It was fun to watch ibex, but throughout the day the wind whipped and howled. I began to wonder if the rocky outcrop I was stationed at was too exposed and that the ibex avoided it during high winds. As the sun neared the horizon, it began to appear that my day of waiting would be a bust. Even so, I had thoroughly enjoyed myself, despite having no ibex approach within range. With less than 45-minutes of light left, I hoped the wind might die the following day and entice ibex to return to their lofty playground.

Suddenly 2-nannies burst into view only 100-yards below! However, instead of taking the “easy” route, they climbed straight up the rock face well beyond bow range. I lamented that even had a billy had been with them it was way too far for me to shoot. Then a pair of medium-sized billies appeared where the nannies had. They broke from the nannies path and circled below, suggesting they would climb toward me!

I carefully retreated to my seat and readied myself, but none appeared. After 15-minutes I risked another peek below and didn’t see anything. With no idea where they might have gone or whether others might follow, I settled back, planning to sit until dark.

Just minutes later I heard rocks clatter below me. I knew that if I could hear rocks over the whipping wind, an animal must be very close. I waited in expectation and suddenly a whopper ibex burst into view around the boulder that formed part of my hide! I immediately recognized the light coat and subtle limp as the large billy that had disappeared far below over than an hour ago. No one but the Lord could have known that he his group would come all the way back up here, but I was thrilled that the Lord had steered him within my grasp.

As I had anticipated, he immediately stared my way from under 10-yards. In addition to full camouflage, including facemask and gloves, the branches and yucca leaves I had piled below me paid off, because after a few minutes he turned his head to stare away, and then upward. Satisfied, he continued to climb. Just as I had envisioned, when he went behind the nearby tree I drew my bow, then aimed and released when he stepped into the clear at only 5-yards! I detected only a slight hesitation as my arrow appeared to hit him, change direction slightly, and continue onward into the brush. The big billy lurched uphill a few yards and out of sight while my mind reeled. Had I actually seen my arrow zip through him, or were my eyes playing tricks on me? By now I had invested

over 30-days on the mountain over nearly 2-decades: had I really just shot an ibex? I quickly nocked another arrow and eased ahead. I glimpsed him on a rock ledge 30-yards above, but he disappeared before I could draw my bow.

I sat down in shock and replayed the events. After having been so sure of recovering the bull elk in September and then being let down, I refused to get my hopes up. After waiting 20-minutes, it was barely light enough to see without my headlamp, so I crept over to find my arrow. I was crestfallen: the broadhead had only a few hairs on it, and the fletching only had a tiny smear of blood. It appeared that I had only creased the bottom of his chest and inflicted a flesh wound. Doubts crept in as the evidence suggested I had somehow muffed the opportunity. Since I was unsure of the hit, and the loose rocks would make looking for a blood trail noisy, I decided to back out and take up my search in the morning, rather than risk pushing the potentially wounded animal away and jeopardize finding him.

With a heavy heart I descended to my bivy tent and settled in for the night after a "hearty" meal comprised of an energy bar and water. The only flat place to sit was in my tent. The wind whipped dust and debris, making me appreciate the luxury of being able to zip tightly inside. Had I left the tent behind I would have inhaled dust and sand all night long!

My text message to Laurie that night summed up the situation:

- Well I hit a whopper. Problem is he was really close: 5-yards & my brain melted. Think I hit low in chest maybe only flesh wound. Have to give it time & search in morning. Dug flat spot into sidehill for tent. Wind howling, tent shaking like crazy. Going to be a long night on both counts.

After tossing and turning most of the night, I awoke, fueled up with an energy drink and bar and retraced my path upwards before dawn. I crept into my hide in hopes of getting a follow-up shot at the billy if he remained on the rock ledge and was only wounded. I positioned myself where I could cover any movement above and nocked an arrow. As the sky brightened I did not detect anything. I gradually climbed to obtain a full view of the rock ledge, and suddenly spotted the fallen monarch below me! He had tumbled to within a dozen yards of where I had originally shot him! My knees grew weak in disbelief and all I could repeat was "Thank you Lord!" as I picked my way down to the beast.



The monarch had fallen with his horns hanging up on a dead tree, which probably kept him from tumbling much farther down the steep slope

Piecing together the clues afterward confirmed that my shot had actually been good and it was likely he had died before I had even made it back to my bivy the night before. My arrow had sliced the liver and stomach, and then angled forward above his heart and exited through his far shoulder: definitely lethal in very short order. It still surprises me how little evidence of a hit showed on my arrow, but as I traced his route upward, the volume of blood on the rocks would have assured me of the lethal hit, had I been confident enough to look for sign the night before.

I snapped trophy photos and made quick work of breaking down the ibex into bags of deboned meat, cape and horns. Thankfully the weather was overcast and cooler than it had been on prior days, plus I was in the shade of a large rock face throughout the process of butchering and loading my pack.



Rear view – approximately 8-years old by my count of the growth rings on his horns



Fully loaded pack: time for the downhill quad-burner

I shouldered the heavy load and began the steep descent toward my bivy gear. Each step was tricky, due to loose, shifting rocks, but I managed to keep my footing. Upon reaching my tent, it was time to break down my paltry camp and further add to the weight in my pack. I had no desire to make a return trip up the mountain! Thankfully I had a second trekking pole at bivy camp, and the continued descent with a pole in each hand was actually a little easier despite the extra weight of my sleeping gear.

I took rest stops whenever I came across large boulders that allowed me to sit without having to stand back up from ground level, and reached my truck by midafternoon. It felt like I had aged a lot with my birthday just days earlier: the downhill pack was a killer, and my legs are still recovering. Although after verifying everything on the scale back home, I suppose the 2-mile, 2,000-foot descent with a 101-pound load may have contributed more to my suffering than that extra year of age!



I once thought that Photoshop was the only way I'd end up in a photo like this!

Although ibex can certainly grow larger, the 36-inch horns on this billy are plenty big enough for me, and exemplify a trophy of a lifetime. And I am most certain that very few hunters have killed an ibex at single digit ranges, which makes it all the more sweet.

I am humbled and blessed to have accomplished this quest. What had seemed impossible by my own efforts became possible through Him!



What a beast!