

**Ibex Robin  
December 29, 2014 New Mexico**

**Hebrews 10:35-36**

**“So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.”**



We headed into Robin's ibex hunt brimming with confidence. After chasing these goats four times on my own, totaling more than 30-days in the field, I had finally killed a billy with my bow (October 2013), plus the 2 nannies I killed during a rifle hunt (Feb 2013) so I had plenty of experience. Robin was on a roll after notching four straight big game tags this season (pronghorn, cow elk, oryx and mule deer) and she EXPECTED ibex to be number five. Add my successful late-season archery elk hunt just 2-weeks ago and believe me words like “give up”, “quit” and “unsuccessful” were not in the vocabulary of this duo when we loaded up our trusty Tacoma!

We made a scouting trip with Katie dog in November to introduce Robin to the rugged Florida Mountains of southern New Mexico. I hadn't looked at the regulations in advance - it was simply one of very few free weekends we had available so it was penciled on the calendar. Upon our arrival we encountered numerous hunters and discovered that the once-in-a-lifetime rifle trophy hunt was underway. No matter; it allowed us to give wide berth to areas with lots of hunting pressure and focus on other spots.



Warm weather, a snack and a puppy...it doesn't get much better!



Tally Ho!

At the end of our first day scouting we happened to cross paths with an acquaintance of mine that had drawn a trophy tag. I offered to help him out, having never hunted or spent any time with him in the field. His expression suggested skepticism that a 10-year old girl and I could do much more than help glass from the trucks. Never the less, he accepted and we spent the night with plans to join him until about midday when we would head for home. When the 5:30am alarm rang, this duo was up, dressed, breakfast down and ready to report for duty, with nothing else to do but twiddle our thumbs as we waited for him to get rolling.

We spotting some ibex right off the bat, and ended up chasing them all day (a brutal loop, which included a ton of vertical and substantially more distance than a 4-mile route on the map suggests). To be candid, Robin ripped his legs off! The poor guy had to work his tail off to keep up with us and it was readily apparent that Robin was not the slow one of our threesome! I couldn't have been more proud, and she cemented my confidence in her ability to tackle the rugged mountains during her own hunt at the end of the year.

A week before season I squeezed in a Bonsai run to stash our tent, freeze-dried food, water and other supplies on the mountain to lighten our loads for our real assault. In addition I stacked rocks into a wall to protect our campsite from wind, gathered a huge load of firewood, and cached several large balls of dried sap from dead trees to be used as fire starters. The weather was beautiful and I spent much of the day hiking in short sleeves. Additionally, I spotted several groups of ibex, including some solid "shooters". Everything was coming together.





Shooters while scouting

Some months prior I had carefully explained to Robin the difficulty in drawing this premier tag and the rather slim odds of her ever getting another. I elaborated that this was her hunt and I'd do whatever she wanted, but if she was willing to hunt hard for several days, including passing up smaller animals, she had a chance to shoot a real trophy. With that I asked what she would like to do.

"Well, I'd need a ponytail" was her reply. What?! Was she on another planet? Had she even been listening to me? I bit my tongue and patiently asked her what she had meant. "If we're going to hunt hard for several days and camp out, I'll need to put my hair in a ponytail to keep it from getting all tangled" was her response, as if stating the obvious. I took that as confirmation that she was prepared to hit it hard and give it her all!

The day after celebrating Christmas Robin and I hit the road; I'd be missing our 26<sup>th</sup> anniversary (thanks, honey) as opening day coincided with that special date. As the Florida Mountains came into view I noted that they appeared awfully white: a recent storm had dumped snow! I've hunted ibex in the snow before and it makes the difficult terrain even harder to negotiate. We were equipped for cold weather and the weather forecast for the next few days was to be sunny, so I hoped the snow wouldn't stick around long.

We parked to find over an inch of snow on the desert floor at the base of the mountains. While I questioned our sanity, Robin declared "I love the snow; it's beautiful!" Perhaps a little naive, but that's the spirit, kiddo!



Starting up the mountain



The snow got deeper as we climbed

The snow depth increased as we climbed, but the temperature was pleasant and the sun occasionally poked through the clouds, offering the hope of fairer weather for the morrow.





Are we skiing or hunting ibex?



All good so far; Clarice enjoyed the view from Robin's backpack

I'd venture to guess few 10-year old girls would be in such good spirits while ascending a snow-covered mountain as daylight faded, with only a bivy camp awaiting. All too soon the sun set and the temperature began to drop. Then the wind began to pick up. Robin suggested we stop and dig out our headlamps at a relatively flat area, and we pushed on. Soon we found ourselves taking two steps forward and one step back as we struggled to maintain our footing on the slippery climb. With another half hour of climbing in the dark remaining, Robin's mood began to dampen. We either had to persevere and push on or turn back; stopping was not an option. To bolster her spirits I began to sing The 12 Days of Christmas, and soon she joined in. Singing Christmas carols in the snow while climbing for ibex certainly deviates from holiday tradition! We finally reached our campsite, buried with 6-inches of snow and sprinkled with a huge set of fresh lion tracks. Robin began to crack and she wished we were home. Me too. Thank

God I had stockpiled the firewood and tree sap fire starters. The stone windbreak was worth its weight in gold too. I kicked snow away to clear an area for the tent and had a roaring bonfire going in short order.

Robin soaked up the warmth while I erected the tent and laid out our sleeping bags and pads. Then we fired up the stove to boil water for dehydrated meals. My sister had made some homemade meals as Christmas presents and it turned out Robin absolutely loved the spaghetti with meat sauce! Things didn't seem quite so bad with a healthy blaze and warm food in our bellies.



Life is certainly a lot better with heat!

Robin texted a report to Mommy that we were safe and sound in bivy camp, despite the snow and lion tracks. I'm sure Laurie thought we were insane. I bundled Robin into warm sleepwear, tucked foot warmers into her socks and zipped her tightly into her cocoon, then slipped into mine. I prayed we would be warm enough during the night, as we didn't have any other options. Thankfully we slept snugly and awoke none the worse for wear.

In the morning I dragged myself out of the tent and stoked up the fire. Yikes it was chilly! And I lamented that we were stuck in the clouds with less than 20-yards of visibility. Robin is a real trooper and didn't complain when I dragged her out of her warm bag and sat her down by the fire. These conditions were the worst in which I had ever hunted ibex, and to think I had been hiking in shirtsleeves just the week prior. We gobbled some breakfast and dressed for the day, but by 10am the clouds still hadn't lifted. I texted Laurie to check weather and she said Deming reported clear skies. I added fuel to the fire as we waited for the vapor to lift, but by 11 more snow began to fall. It was foolish to stay outside in those conditions, so we tucked back into our sleeping bags and napped for a few hours until the clouds began to break.





Ah, home was never like this...thank goodness!

We began glassing between holes in the clouds, and started hiking when the sky began to clear. Ibex tracks were everywhere! Each area we hiked or glassed displayed ample evidence that we were in the right place. The problem was I couldn't locate an actual ibex to save my life; they were nowhere to be found.

It didn't help that our first day was drastically shortened due to the weather, but we dragged ourselves back to camp without spotting a single animal. Robin lamented that she really thought that she would get one that first day. Talk about confidence! I reminded her that this was one of the toughest hunts in North America and the current conditions made it doubly, if not triply so.

On the bright side, the clouds had fully cleared and I knew tomorrow would be a nicer day. On the flip side, clear skies meant the nighttime temperature would be colder and I didn't bring enough foot warmers to fill Robin's socks every night. I brainstormed how to ensure she stayed warm and opted to have her wear my Primaloft Kelvin Lite Jacket upside down as pants inside her sleeping bag. Coupled with her own Primaloft jacket, she was essentially double-bagged. I wore an extra layer of hunting clothes and our second night was cozy despite the much colder temperature.

At least the sun provided some warmth as we sat around the fire and ate breakfast the next morning. However, the desert winds had returned and we ended up wearing facemasks and cold weather gear all day.

We loaded up with plenty of snacks and food for the day, and then headed to search for ibex. No snow had melted and the footing was tricky. Again tracks were abundant, although we didn't cross any fresh lion tracks. We pushed farther from camp than we were able to on day one and glassed constantly. By midday we hadn't spotted any ibex, and Robin was hungry. I urged her to press on until we could find a spot devoid of snow and out of the wind so that we could sit down and enjoy some lunch and dry out. Soon it became apparent that finding such a place was every bit, if not more difficult as locating our quarry.





Tough conditions

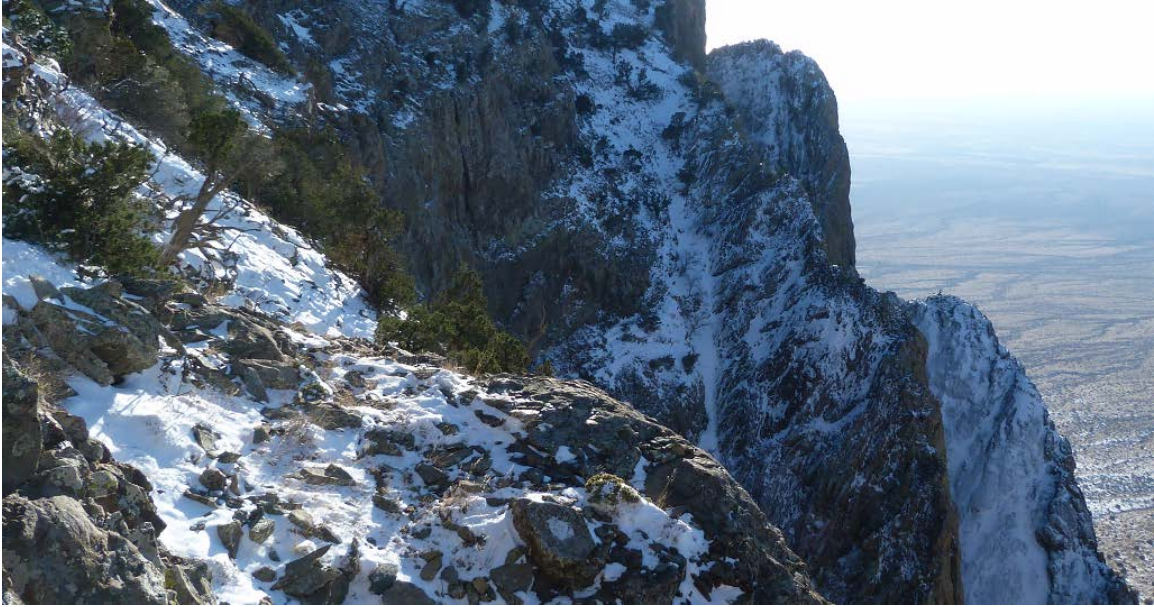


Pressing on to find a decent spot to take a break

Finally I found a reasonable place to sit down and heat up lunch. I had originally planned to make a fire, but our meager site was too steep. However, we found it to be actually quite pleasant in the sun and protected from the wind, and after a warm burrito, some Hydration and other snacks, our mood had improved greatly.



While Robin enjoyed being out of the incessant wind, I glassed below and was suddenly rewarded with a flash of tan in an opening between some rocks! I quickly whistled and beckoned Robin to me, so that she could take a look at her first ibex during her season.



Ibex have to be down there somewhere...don't they?

The small band below us consisted of several nannies and some small billies. "Are they bigger than yours?" Robin asked. "Definitely not" I replied. "Then we don't want to go after them; they're too small" Robin summarized. It was satisfying to hear that despite the rough conditions Robin was not ready to give in and pull the trigger on the first ibex we laid eyes on.

We watched them until we were fairly certain one of their grand daddies wasn't hiding nearby, then stowed our gear and slowly crept along the knife-edged crest of the cliff, peering down for others.



The first ibex spotting during Robin's hunt!

Soon I spotted a lone billy hunkered between some rocks. Thanks to our stealthy approach, he had no idea we were around; however, he was in a poor position for any shot and even as we watched, he moved out of sight. Considering him worthy of Robin's tag, we circled above to try and relocate him.



First shooter billy!

Finally I spotted his horns moving in some thick brush as he rubbed them against the limbs. A quick range reading indicated we were within 100-yards! We had a large rock in front of us, so I hastened to get Robin set up on the solid rest, and kicked snow from under our feet for traction. Between keeping tabs on the ibex and getting Robin settled it was hectic. I tried to point out his location, but it was impossible to see him without binoculars.

I glanced back at the billy and lo and behold he had moved into the open and was standing broadside! I turned and hissed to Robin "Do you see him? He's right in the open". She responded immediately "Yes, there he goes." I turned back to see him in 5<sup>th</sup> gear kicking up snow as he burned away downhill. What the heck?! There was no way he could have seen or heard us, but for some unknown reason he boogied. Despite the howling wind, perhaps he had caught our scent. Or maybe that mountain lion was lurking around somewhere. Regardless, that opportunity had quickly vanished. We reluctantly packed up and continued our search.

Along the way we spotted a couple of golden eagles soaring *below* us. It's a subtle hint that you're crazy when you're climbing snow covered terrain higher than the eagles soar!





If only we could hike as effortlessly as this golden eagle soared!

Soon we reached another vantage point and sat to glass. Somewhere far below a gunshot rang out. I wasn't sure if it was an ibex hunter or someone after quail, but I scanned downward to see if I might discover any reason for the shot. I couldn't see any hunters, but soon located a large herd of ibex rapidly working their way up toward us. Despite their position far below, it appeared that they might actually come within range! I quickly pointed them out and handed the binoculars to Robin, and then set up the shooting sticks and readied her rifle while she tracked their progress. The group contained some large billies and it was neat to watch their progress and anticipate their approach.



Ibex ascending toward us!

The majestic animals covered the terrain at a pace that would have been impossible for us, even without the snow. They closed the distance, and soon the lead nannies were within 200-yards. I carefully instructed Robin not to move, as we were in the open and in direct sunlight. I feared that the sharp-eyed leaders might notice us and spook. Just then something went awry and they veered away slightly, taking the herd with them.



Lead nanny acting suspicious

The group stopped across the canyon at 250-yards: a tad farther than we had hoped, but well within the capability of her rifle. I got her lined up on the largest billy in the group by carefully calling out his movements to be sure we were looking at the same animal, and then we watched him for a while. He stood rock solid and broadside. I asked Robin if her rest felt solid and whether she wanted to shoot. She calmly assessed the situation and told me that she felt good and was ready. I buried the binos into my eye sockets to keep tabs on things and whispered that it was OK to pass if she didn't feel comfortable, but I was ready whenever she was. At the report of her rifle the billy didn't even flinch. I studied him and the group in general as they began to mill about. I was absolutely certain that she had not hit him. Who knows what had happened. But of one thing I was confident: it was a clean miss.

The strain of our physical efforts and the weather conditions caught up to her and Robin's emotions kicked in as the herd loped out of sight. She sobbed "Why did God make me miss?!" I told her I wasn't sure if He had actually made her miss, but that there were a lot of factors working against us on this shot and no matter what He was in control. I reiterated that she had missed on previous hunts that had worked out just fine in the end and perhaps the Lord actually did have a reason for things not coming together this time. I also explained that if she had killed the billy, there was no way to reach him from our position. We would have had to retreat down the mountain, drive to another access point, and then climb to his location. Maybe it was for the best that she had missed.





With heavy hearts we began to trudge back to camp, all the while keeping a sharp eye out for other animals. At one point I glanced back and caught movement. Immediately I knew it wasn't an ibex, and my heart raced that it might be the lion! I threw up my binoculars only to see a forlorn javelina plowing through the snow. I had never seen a javelina in the Floridas, and this poor guy was up to his belly in white powder. I pointed him out to Robin and he later became the subject of a story I made up for Robin to help pass the time.

Soon I found myself off track and we had to push through brush and sidehill over loose, snow covered rocks. The conditions were as tough as I've ever been in. At times I had to pack a path through the snow to keep Robin's legs from plowing. At other times I had to hold her hand to help her along; a time or two her grip helped me stay upright! The sun had set and daylight was waning. The wind had picked up and it was downright miserable. Robin lamented that she wished we were at the tent. I concurred, but we had to persevere and press on.

Robin asked me to tell her a story about the javelina to help boost her spirits and pass the time as we slogged through the snow. I began to make up a funny story about a young javelina that didn't listen to his mother when she told him to beware of treacherous weather in the desert. He thought to himself "Just a few days ago I saw a man hiking in a short sleeved shirt; what is there to worry about?" (of course that would have been me caching our gear). The story concluded with Ichabod and Nannette the ibex telling the poor javelina how to get to lower country to find his family, and him pressing onward through the snow.

Our persistence and the humorous story paid off as we eventually spotted our tent far ahead. We pushed on and reached camp just about the time we needed to break out our headlamps. Thankfully the snow had melted from our immediate camp pad, so we had relatively dry ground to shed our gear. I rustled in our backpacks for our lights so I could see to get a fire going and after a few minutes a chill ran down my spine. I unzipped the tent to confirm that I had left our headlamps behind. If Robin had killed that ibex we might have been in a world of

hurt with no lights. I informed Robin of my oversight and that perhaps God had steered her bullet off track after all. We rejoiced that Robin had missed and gave thanks for reaching camp safely.

I texted a status report to a close friend who had hunted ibex before and was familiar with the mountain range. His response was “Dang, she’s tougher than I am...and you can tell her that!” I shared this with Robin to provide encouragement.

A clear night meant cold temperatures again, so after a quick hot meal and a change of socks, we brushed our teeth and snuggled into our bags.

As expected, the day dawned bright and clear. I stoked the fire and rustled Robin out of her bag to get started on the day, and again stocked my backpack with food and drinks (and headlamps!)

We started hiking toward where we had seen the ibex the prior day, but right from the start Robin was moving noticeably slower than on the previous days. I couldn’t understand why: a late-night, snowy ascent to our bivy camp; 3 nights bivy camping in the snow; a day and a half of difficult hiking in snowy, slippery conditions keeping up with daddy - why would she possibly be tired?! Actually I was sympathetic and suggested we sit down to glass and discuss our options.

I had previously determined that at best we could only handle one more night up high before retreating to the truck for water (it’s amazing how quickly we used 3 of our 4 gallons) and to give Robin (and me) a break from being in the snow.

I set up the tripod and binoculars and dug out some snacks for Robin, despite being only 30-min out from breakfast, and then presented some alternatives.



Where are those ibex?

“Kiddo, you know how far we went to find those ibex yesterday, and how hard it was to hike there. Are you up for working that hard again, or should we consider packing up our gear, hiking down to the truck and then working the mountain



from the bottom for the next couple of days?" I encouraged her that she already had worked harder than anyone I know. I told her that I didn't know anyone else that would have put up with the conditions she had faced and that her perseverance was above and beyond anything I could have expected.

She pondered for a little while and finally admitted that hiking down the mountain seemed like our best plan. With that we retreated to camp and I let Robin refuel and warm herself by the fire while I loaded all of our bivy gear into my backpack. I added our sleeping pads and other miscellaneous gear beside Clarice in Robin's pack and we shouldered them for the slippery downward slide. As we started I told Robin that we would scan for ibex the entire way down, as I wasn't ready to give up on the day just yet.



Time to drop below snow line

We glassed periodically along our descent and as we neared the halfway point I spotted a group of ibex one canyon away! They were well out of range, but our route would bring us closer, so I suggested we continue and then assess things when we cut the distance, in hopes of hatching a plan of attack.

The group contained several nannies and immature billies along with some good billies. Some were bedded, while others fed, which suggested they might stay put for a little while.





A sight for sore eyes!

We approached the concealment of a large bush, dropped our packs, and crawled into position to study the herd. I got Robin set up on the binoculars and I could barely pry her eyes away for a peek of my own! She excitedly told me what the herd was up to and where it looked like they were headed.



Robin letting her eyes do the walking

Some of the nannies began to scamper up a sheer rock face and the rest of the herd leisurely followed. Nothing surprises me with ibex anymore, but Robin was amazed at the stuff these sure footed animals could scale. She said she couldn't wait to see their hooves up close to understand how they could climb so well.





Easy walking for an ibex!



Look ma, no ropes!

The group scampered up onto the rocks, scanned below, and then dropped back down to feed. Robin noted their apparent method: first use their sharp eyes to scan for danger, and then leave the safe haven of the rocks to browse.



Just a walk in the park!

I ranged them and found them to be within striking distance at just under 500-yards. Unfortunately we were at the edge of a sunlit snow-covered slope. We would stand out like a sore thumb if we approached any further.

Despite the entertainment provided by these nimble animals, I pried Robin away from the optics and plotted a course down a narrow chute that might provide concealment during our approach. The chute was much more difficult than the route we had been retracing downward, but it was the only option. Persevere.

At first it appeared that we might get within range as the herd grazed downhill, but before long they began to angle uphill and farther away. It seemed that every yard we gained was lost doubly as the herd retreated.

We arrived at the end of our cover and all we could do was watch the ibex frolic on the opposite side of the canyon just out of range. We waited and I let Robin watch their antics through the binoculars, taking joy at her delight in observing them. Gradually the group made their way uphill toward a large pinnacle of rock we dubbed the "cylinder", as from perspective it looked like a stone monument over one hundred feet high. As we watched, the lead nannies began to circle around the cylinder and disappear from our view. In short order the entire herd was out of sight, which gave us the break we needed to hustle down the open hillside and ascend the opposite side of the valley.





Frolicking ibex

Soon we crossed the rough trail we would have been on had we not detoured down the ravine to stay hidden. Knowing that we would be returning to this location, it was time to shed the weight of our bivy gear before continuing our pursuit. Because my pack was stuffed to the gills with both bagged and loose gear, I was loathe to burn time unloading it, so we simply dropped our packs and I kept only the GPS, one headlamp and the rangefinder. I grabbed Robin's shooting sticks, shouldered her rifle, and we clambered upward, trying to make time while her quarry was out of view.

We made it 100-yards before the lead nannies began to emerge from behind the cylinder, which complicated things. We had to slow down and move carefully from boulder to yucca or other cover; keeping out of sight to the extent possible and a low profile where we had to be exposed. After several minutes we dropped into a ravine and quickly scrambled up a rocky chute to gain elevation. I instructed Robin to sit tight while I belly crawled up to the top for a look.

I immediately spotted nannies on top of the next rock knob. My rangefinder confirmed they were within shooting distance at 180-yards! I slithered back to Robin to report. Although I hadn't seen any billies, they would be nearby; we would get situated and bide our time.

We didn't dare go all the way on top of our outcrop because it was in the sunshine and in full view of the ibex across from us. I set up Robin's shooting sticks and got her into a seated position where she could keep tabs on the ibex. However, the slope was not very comfortable and her shooting sticks precarious; I wished that we could slip another few yards ahead onto the flat.

It was about 45-minutes before sunset and it began to feel chilly in the shade. I wasn't sure how long Robin could hold out. Soon she began to shiver a little,

which had me worried until Robin whispered “I’m not shaking because of the cold.” I asked her what was up and she replied “I have to go to the bathroom!” Not knowing how much longer we might need to sit, I told her we should take care of business immediately. We belly crawled back into the chute to relieve her bladder and made it back up to our position without being spotted.

Eventually some of the nannies stood and began to move about and I hissed to Robin that something might happen shortly. Sure enough, we caught a glimpse of larger horns poking up from behind the peak. It appeared to be an immature billy, but confirmed that more animals were just out of view just beyond the nannies. Gradually some of the nannies filtered over the top of the rock and out of sight. I whispered to Robin that if the rest of them followed, we would scoot forward and get her into a better shooting position. When the last nanny disappeared, we quickly shifted onto the flat and I crawled ahead to peek below. There were no ibex, but just as I began to retreat to Robin some nannies and small billies began to ascend the side of the rocky monolith in front of us. I stayed low and got back to her. The sun began to set as I whispered the report. In order to keep warm I sat directly behind her with my chest against her back to combine our body heat and hopefully stave off the chill.

Robin diligently scanned the rock face and soon the first ibex emerged. We had already been waiting for over 45-minutes and I encouraged her that if she could hang tough; surely she would get a crack at a good billy.

Next some large billies appeared on the skyline! We could only see their horns and heads, but there were several shooters. All we needed was one to step out broadside...within the next 15-20 minutes before we lost shooting light.

One by one the animals moved about on the rock face. I scanned through the binoculars while Robin kept tabs through her rifle scope. Every time it appeared that a particular billy would turn broadside I would guide Robin to it, but time and again the billy would either freeze or move too quickly for Robin to shoot. The sky grew dimmer and before long shooting light would be gone. What’s more I was shivering. I huddled against Robin, trying to help hold in her body heat. My shivering would result in nothing more than shaky binoculars; however, if Robin started to shiver it would be difficult, if not impossible for her to make a good shot. I hugged Robin tightly and whispered a prayer into her ear. “Lord, we know you’re in control. We ask for a good shot opportunity and that you guide her bullet.”

Suddenly a good billy poked his head around the left side of the rock face and soon came fully into view. I steered Robin to him and told her to keep tabs on his body position. He angled to the side and it looked like he would offer a broadside shot. But then he spun around so that only his rump faced us. Drat.

The billy looked back in our direction and then turned again, standing fully broadside and rock solid! “He’s broadside, are you on him?” I whispered. “Yes!” Robin replied. “If you feel comfortable I’m ready whenever you are, just let me



know before you shoot” I instructed. “OK, I’m ready now” Robin hissed. I locked my eyes into my binoculars, ready to identify evidence of a hit.

BOOM! Instantly her billy plummeted in free fall! I distinctly recall having time to think “Oh my, that cliff is higher than we thought” before the muted boom of her ibex striking the ground below reached our ears. From our vantage we could not see the bottom of the cliff, but I had assumed it was only a matter of 20-30 feet high; instead it was closer to 100!

Robin turned to me and proudly exclaimed “We know he’s dead now!” No kidding, girl. She had drilled him, later confirmed to be right through the heart!

We hugged and celebrated, and then began to pick our way down to her trophy. Surprisingly the ibex above us simply watched and snorted their duck-like alarm quack. I suspect they were in disbelief that anybody had been crazy enough to chase them at these heights!

We had a hard time finding where Robin’s ibex had fallen because there were several narrow chutes directly below his perch. We carefully worked our way around the rocks and brush to peek below, and eventually found him directly below, yet unapproachable due to a vertical rock face over 15-feet tall. As I evaluated routes to approach him Robin suggested that I simply hold the GPS above him to mark his location and then we retrieve our backpacks and butchering tools. “After all, we’re right on top of him, so the GPS will mark the right spot!” Robin declared.

I concurred that we didn’t need to spend time getting to him until we had the gear to not only butcher him, but pack him off the mountain, so I donned my headlamp and held Robin’s hand while we scrambled down the rockslide toward our backpacks. I had marked the location on our GPS, so it was relatively easy to find our packs, and in no time we had removed everything but knife, game bags and Clarice. Then we re-ascended the steep pitch and made our way to the bottom of the crevice that held Robin’s billy.

I had to break through brush at the mouth of the chute, and then held branches aside so that Robin could be the first to approach her prize. The billy was most impressive and, thanks to her perseverance, the pinnacle of Robin’s New Mexico safari, no pun intended. I was awestruck that Robin had killed animal number five in a single season!

We admired Robin’s trophy and gave prayers of thanksgiving for our safety and for Robin’s success. Then we snapped trophy photos and relished the moment.



What a prize!



What a team (Clarice, too!)



Next we dove into the task of breaking the animal down into bags of lean, organic, red meat. By now Robin is getting to be a pro, and with her help we had the ibex loaded into our packs by about 10pm. Robin carried the backstraps and I took the remainder, including the head and hide. We shouldered our packs and began the treacherous initial descent. The loose rocks rolled underfoot, and we were thankful for two hiking poles apiece, as they saved our bacon on multiple occasions.



Happy duo!

We arrived at our pile of bivy gear at 11pm. I had planned ahead and packed extra sleeping bags and other camp gear in the truck, so we didn't need to bring any of this gear down on our first trip. Robin exclaimed that she was starving. Seeing nothing magic about waiting to eat until we reached the truck, I suggested we cook dinner right there on the mountain. We heated bean burritos and turned off our headlamps. The moon was half-full and provided ample light so see clearly. Additionally, it was not bright enough to obscure the stars. Sitting next to Robin, with the moonlit view, the majesty of the universe above and her ibex in our backpacks is an experience I will cherish forever. It doesn't get any better!

After refueling, we continued our descent and reached the truck just after midnight. Robin stated she was still hungry, so we cooked a second dinner and then snuggled into sleeping bags in the back of my truck. I had a tent, but it would have been impossible to erect it on the rocky, cactus-covered terrain.



Base camp

We slept in, ate breakfast, and prepared to retrieve our bivy gear. The sky was clear, the weather was mild and we anticipated an easy hike.

As we climbed, we could see the outcrop where Robin had killed her ibex. From this perspective we could see that he had plummeted quite some distance and the Lord had blessed us with that flight, because retrieving him from the high pinnacle could have been life threatening.



Robin's ibex fell along the yellow path and lodged in a chute behind a large bush



Despite our packs being empty, we were tuckered and it was a slow climb. We finally reached our pile of gear and Robin asked what we had to eat. We had plenty of options and ultimately Robin enjoyed a hobbit's "second breakfast" and enjoyed the view. I packed our bivy gear and we dropped toward the truck for the last time.



Beauty in the desert



Beauty in the desert

We arrived at the truck about noon and gratefully dropped our packs, loaded the truck and then pointed for home. The hours on the highway gave us ample time to relive the hunt, share each other's perspective, rest our legs, bond, and listen to Nancy Drew mystery stories.

"Kiddo," I said at one point "we make a pretty good team." To which Robin replied with a chuckle, "Yep, you find 'em, I shoot 'em!"

I reported the good news to a friend back in Albuquerque and he texted back "Hardcore! There is more than one Crazy Abrams!" We took that as a complement.

I shared Robin's success with the good friend from whom I had bought her.243 youth rifle. He replied "You sure didn't waste any time getting your money's worth out of the gun!"

When I told him that Robin still had a February javelina tag in her pocket he retorted "You guys are certifiable!"

Perhaps, but I'd say we're confident and willing to persevere.

Congrats kiddo, you're as tough as they come.