

2007 AZ Big Game Super Raffle Sheep Winner Eric Hunt

In June 2007 I got an email from the Arizona Big Game Super Raffle committee reminding me to buy tickets soon because of the deadline that was quickly approaching. I hesitated a bit because I had always considered myself “unlucky”, but decided to buy some tickets because I knew the money would go to a good cause. I proceeded to buy five tickets each for elk, mule deer, antelope, and desert sheep and quickly forgot about it until a couple weeks later. On July 7th while watching a UFC fight with some friends, I got a call from a strange number and decided to let it go to my voicemail. After about fifteen minutes I checked my message and about passed out when I heard Chris Denham informing me that I had just won the Super Raffle desert sheep tag while everyone was cheering in the background! It was the most awesome feeling hearing those sweet words and I listened to that message again to make sure I was hearing him right. I’m really not sure who was in shock more, myself for just learning that I just won a once in a lifetime sheep hunt, or my “non-hunting” friends that I was with who looked at me really strange when I stood up all excited and told them I just won a sheep tag. I know they were thinking down the lines of “what the heck is Eric into?”

After a sleepless night I started doing my research right away the next morning and called Garth Carter of the Huntin Fool. Garth gave me some great information and informed me that I would be hunting the Nelsoni sheep units of northwestern Arizona and wanted me to call back the next day to talk to Jason Carter so I could find out who he recommended for sheep guides. After speaking with Jason I had a great list of guides so I started making my phone calls. It took about a week after talking to some great sheep experts but I finally chose to hunt with Chris Harlow and Tyson Hatch who own Double H Outfitters. I spoke with Chris several times over the next few days and in no time I was watching video of some huge rams that they had previously seen in my units. Chris informed me that I would be hunting with Gino Wullkotte and that we would most likely start our hunt in October sometime. Gino contacted me a few days later and after speaking with him in length I knew we were going to do well because he sounded like a very dedicated and hard working guide. Many hours were spent at the range shooting and I was now very comfortable with my dad’s new Christensen Arms 300wsm. Scouting started very soon in a couple of units that had the possibility for a big ram with only a few small rams seen. We decided to concentrate on unit 13b and start the hunt in October.

October came very fast and we were hoping the rut would be going strong upon our arrival. We were joined on the hunt by Gino’s son Colton and good friend Lee Hop, and my dad who would help us glass during the day, but was quickly elected to camp cook during the evenings because of his great cooking abilities! We hunted hard for three days and saw a ton of sheep, but with the rut going a little slower than expected we didn’t see the mature rams that we had hoped for. One of highlights of the trip was having a small ram walk within a few yards of me while we were glassing. I didn’t see him until I pulled my head away from my Swarovski 15x56 binoculars and he scared the living crap out of me! He then posed for some great close up pictures! Another highlight was when Gino, Colton, Lee and I waded across the Virgin River to get into one of the canyons we wanted to check out and after seeing over twenty sheep it was a great day. I remember thinking to myself that this sheep hunting is just awesome! After day three we decided to pull out and return in a few weeks hoping conditions would improve.

In the meantime I just didn't feel right sitting home with this type of tag burning a hole in my pocket, so my girlfriend and I took a few days off and decided to check out one of my units that was just a couple of hours from my house. Loaded down with maps that I borrowed from Gino, we headed out. Within a few hours of the first evening we spotted eight ewes feeding on a ridge, so we went to bed with high hopes of finding a nice ram in the morning! The next morning the sheep were right where we left them and now had two awesome looking rams with them. We watched them for the next hour or so and it took all I had not to sneak up there and smoke one of those rams. Now with my terrible sheep judging skills and knowing that I had a whole year to hunt we made a wise decision and decided to get out of the area before I did something stupid. Gino and I returned to the area about a week later to try and get a better look at the rams and the sheep were on the exact same hill. We were able to find one of the two rams I had seen and Gino commented that I must have been drinking the peyote tea on the first trip because he wasn't close to what we were looking for, but he was definitely a beautiful ram!

Mid November we headed back up north and with some great info of some big rams spotted we had high hopes we were going to "get bloody", as Gino likes to say it. Gino had arrived at camp the evening before me and had spotted some sheep deep in one of the large canyons. Even at such a long distance he could see a dark horned ram that definitely needed a closer look. With no way to approach the area from down below we decided to hike in and come above the area we hoped the sheep would be. After a short quad ride the next morning we began our long hike into the area. Our hike took 7- 8 hours to get to where we wanted to be and on our way in we saw another group of sheep with two smaller rams and some very nice muley bucks. When we finally reached our canyon we were slowly creeping along the edge looking below when Gino spotted a ram. As I peered over I could see a dark horned ram feeding below. About that time I heard Gino say, "Holy crap, get your gun. I just found your shooter." So I grabbed the .300wsm I was using and got set up on Gino's pack for the shot. Gino ranged the ram at just over 300 yards straight down into the canyon, and I asked when he was ready for me to shoot. His response was classic, "Anytime after, NOW!" At the shot he dropped immediately and we finally had our ram!

With the sheep down, that is when the fun started, figuring out how we were going to get to him. I still have nightmares to this day of Gino taking me 100 vertical feet off the cliff, down into the canyon below! That is when I found out he is referred to as "spider man" by his friends. I don't think I will ever forgive him for that. I soon forgot about it as I made my way up to my ram. He was just awesome and was a warrior for sure with all the scars and his big broken nose! Back at camp Gino and Lee scored my ram at just over 164", which is a very large Nelsoni sheep. Again thanks to Gino, Colton, Lee, Rose, Scott, and my Dad for all the help on this hunt. And a very special thanks to Greg Koons for some great sheep information, and to Bob Price and Brad Fulk with the Arizona Game and Fish, who gave up half a day of deer hunting on the Arizona Strip to help us pack out my ram! Also, thanks to Luke Thompson, Matt Pierce, Dave Conrad, and Victoria Gouldsbury who are with the Arizona Game and Fish for helping my team and I with some very valuable information.