

# MONTANA

## SPORTING JOURNAL



*Fall-Winter 2011*

2011 HUNTING TALES

HUNTING MONTANA'S MOUNTAIN GOATS

AN INTERVIEW WITH RANDY NEWBERG

HANGING OUT IN ELKTOWN, MONTANA

\$4.95 US • \$5.95 CAN



*Randy Newberg is a Bozeman-based sportsman who has spent his entire life, whether in the north woods of Minnesota or the mountains of the West, hunting and fishing. He doesn't mind doing things the hard way, in fact, he prefers it that way, as seen in his popular TV program, On Your Own Adventures. Newberg was recently named as a member of the Conservation/Government Issues Committee with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation.*

### **What was the impetus for starting Own Your Own Adventures?**

At the risk of offending some, I had tired of seeing the same thing on every hunting show, none of which I could relate to. There was nothing that reflected hunting as it occurs for me and friends. My son convinced me we could do as well, or better, than most of what we saw on TV. He and I had spent a few years filming each other and filming friends. We had kicked around many ideas that pretty much went nowhere. After a while, I tired of cameras interrupting our hunts and had folded up the filming ideas. In the fall of 2008, Marc Pierce, the former host of Ducks Unlimited TV, called to tell me he had started a production company and wanted to talk. He knew I was pretty serious in my hunting. He believed a self-guided hunting idea would be a great TV series. First I laughed and asked, "Why me?" He assured me that his team at Warm Springs Productions thought it would be a hit and that I could do it. He sent camera



crews with me for the first two months of the season, even though we had no agreement. Finally, he showed me some of the footage and edits and I was convinced it might work. Late that year, we signed an agreement for them to produce the show and prepare for network placement. I went out seeking sponsors and a network home. And as they say, "The rest is history."

### **Was the intent to promote a TV show or promote hunting itself?**

My intent with everything I have done with this TV show, our website, and even all my volunteer work prior to the TV show, is to promote hunting as it occurs for the average person. To promote hunting as an important part of our culture and provide some identity to hunters who feel unattached to most of what they see on outdoor television.

### **What has been the biggest struggle in launching the show?**

As far as launching the show, no doubt, it would be the finances. Producing high quality TV is very expensive. There are many, many shows out there. We are all competing for the same sponsorship dollars. My goal has never been to get rich with this idea, but I had hoped that I would be able to cover costs, create a brand that the self-guided hunter can identify with, and hopefully not have to fund it all out of my own pocket. The financial challenges are made even more difficult when you realize how the sponsorship world works. Most sponsorship decisions are made by ad agencies, many of whom do not hunt, or if they do hunt, they are taken to an exclusive estate or some other controlled environment to hunt. Our hunts are difficult hunts. They are all self-guided, competing with other hunters on accessible lands. The sponsorship world at first wanted to lump us in with all the other hunting shows. Fortunately, we had some early sponsors who knew the difference and had been looking for a show such as ours to reach the largest segment of their customer base – The On Your Own hunter. I can honestly say, that without the early support of Federal Ammunition, Leupold Optics, and Otis Technologies, this show that has become so popular with the self-guided hunter would not have made it past the first two seasons.

### **What has been your biggest surprise regarding the outdoor television industry?**

The industry itself? That would be how few of the people in much of the outdoor television industry are hardcore hunters, at least to the degree of what we would define a hardcore hunter by Montana standards. I guess that shouldn't be a surprise, as



many of them look at this as entertainment, not necessarily the passionate pursuit that we know it to be.

To me, all of that is important for hunters to know and to continue working to improve. Maybe I am all wet, but I feel if we forget the conservation story of how we got here and how hunters were the critical group pulling the wagon of wildlife recovery, we are destined to lose our value and purpose in the eyes of others.

**What are your thoughts on the industry-created “rack-envy?”**

I will probably get toasted by those “horn porn” kings and queens for saying this, but I hate the “rack envy.” I feel TV is a big contributor to that disease. If all hunting has to offer to society and to our viewers is the quest for a bigger buck or bull, then we probably shouldn’t have hunting on TV.

Record books and scores were started as a way to determine the quality and value of habitat in certain areas. Now, we see people using scores as a way to determine their hunting prowess. If I see one more TV show where they walk up to the animal and start talking about scores and inches, I think I am going to shoot my TV.

To me, the value of hunting is so much deeper, so much more valuable than just some antlers or horns measured by score or

size. Emphasis on that cheapens the viewing experience and does a disservice to hunting.

**How do you respond to those that say we can’t create divisions within the hunting community and we must stick together, despite our different styles of hunting?**

Again, this is just my opinion, knowing opinions are formed by our life experiences and the manner in which we participate in the debated activity. I am all about hunting being a “Big Tent” with room for many forms and styles of hunting. The big tent theory doesn’t mean we don’t have our differences. When we have differences, we need to air them out and sort out what is best for hunting. I say we need to have debates about hunting, in a manner that helps us define what is hunting and what is not hunting. I don’t subscribe to the theory that we need to circle the wagons every time. We are all better off if we have strong discussions of what will be the image and definition of hunting. There are many activities that want to be included as part of the honorable past time of hunting. Yet, some of these activities do nothing positive for conservation, do not provide any funding to state agencies, and are the conduit through which the anti-hunting movement gains the most ground. Hunting is much appreciated and accepted within American society. Hunting will always have support in our society if we provide value. We

need to make sure that hunting continues to be important to our society. By leading in the efforts of conservation, providing a history of concern for wildlife and wild places, and by being the primary funding source for wildlife management, society finds great value in hunting. Doing all that, while procuring the lean organic meat for our tables is what will keep hunting viewed positively by Americans. Where we run a risk is when we let hunting become something other than that. When the image of hunting is defined merely by trophies for walls, with questionable methods or chance of escape, we should expect that it will come under scrutiny. It seems the most scrutinized activities are the ones always asking hunters to come to their rescue. As a hunter, I am not sure some of those questionable activities even fall under the definition I would use for hunting. I know I will get flamed for saying that, but that is how I feel.

### **What are some of your fondest outdoor memories as a child?**

Those would all revolve around hunting and fishing with family and friends. I grew up in a town of 500 people. Everyone hunted and fished, with many earning spending money by trapping and selling furs. It was not a question of whether you were going hunting or fishing, but how many days you would be gone in such pursuits. The community celebrated the events. The schools closed for the opening of deer season. Times spent at the family cabin on the lake my great grandparents homesteaded in northern Minnesota were fertile grounds for the seeds of a youngster awestruck by the outdoor lifestyle. A little fertilizer provided by my Dad, while taking me on his grouse hunts when I was too young to shoot, only put the roots deeper in the soil. Waiting on deer stands with him or catching walleyes in the river eddy below our house cemented the path of my future. Running traplines with my uncles and learning more about animals and their behavior were special winter pursuits that I wish more youngsters could enjoy today. Seeing your entire family drop their heavy labors of a logging business for a couple weeks each year, when deer season and fishing season opened, made it clear that you came from a family of hunters. Not just for food, but for the ties that would bind us together as family and community.

### **How and when did you end up in Montana?**

I will try to tell this quickly. I grew up in the small berg of Big Falls, Minnesota. A place tucked away in the swamps of Koochiching County. College took me to Arizona, then Nevada, where I met my wife and we were married. She was, and still is, the biggest fishing nut in the family. For our honeymoon, she asked if we could go on a two-week fishing trip. Sounded good to me. So, after a few days in Oregon, Washington, and Idaho, we headed to Montana. Our first stop was Bozeman. The fishing was better than any time in the 22 years since that trip. We spent the last week of our honeymoon camped at Beartrap Canyon,

enjoying the fishing and me secretly wondering what it would be like to live in Montana. I had dreamed of Montana since childhood, reading of this amazing place in my Dad's hunting magazines.

I still remember driving home to Carson City, wishing for all my weight that we could somehow, some way, live here. It was complete silence in the vehicle. I thought Kim was sleeping, but she was merely mesmerized by the ripples of the Gallatin River from her view out the passenger window. She turned to me and said, "We ought to move here." I almost wrecked the truck. I knew I had married a great woman, but this was greater fortune than any new groom should be rewarded with. It took many interviews and huge pay cuts, but within two years we arrived in Bozeman with our infant son in tow. Never so glad to take a cut in pay. Aside from proposing marriage to my wife, the best decision I ever made.

### **While a difficult question, what is your favorite pursuit or pastime in Montana?**

Wow, that is a tough one. If I said anything other than fishing for walleyes on the Hi-Line, my wife would be mad. My favorite meat is pronghorn and they are my favorite animal. My black lab will disobey if he hears I answered to anything other than northern flight mallards in December. And the many whitetails racks laying around my shop reveal my passion for creek bottoms in November.

Let's see, pronghorn or elk, pronghorn or elk? Hmm. If you asked me my favorite animals to hunt and observe, it would be pronghorn. Uniquely western and beautiful, inhabiting some of the coolest places on the planet.

If you force me to choose just one pastime, not necessarily the animal, but the pastime that causes me to lose the most sleep, anticipating the pursuit each year, it would have to be archery elk in September. Anyone who has had the scream of an elk vibrate their every bone, knows the excitement. The country where the chase happens, from the high peaks of the west to the broken breaks of central and eastern Montana all have an allure and magic that is enchanting. The challenge of taking these animals with "a sharp stick and a string;" to get within 40 yards of a herd of animals that have the nose of a whitetail, the ears of a mule deer, and the ability to cover miles of rough terrain in a big hurry, is probably the greatest of all North American pursuits.

Like all Montanans, I treasure all we have at our disposal. All of these opportunities are something most hunters and anglers from other states pay the King's ransom to enjoy. We are blessed to have it all right here at our doorstep. Where for nothing more than the price of a tag and a tank of gas, we can chase game on millions of acres of public land, in the same tradition of our parents and grandparents.

This pleasure and these treasures make me thankful to live in Montana. A place like no other, made of people like no other.