

The High Hunt

Part 1

Tomo Svetic (Artemis Hunting Ltd) fulfills his dream in one of the highest hunting grounds in the world pursuing Mid Asian Ibex in the adventure of a life time

I grew up in a coastal region of Croatia, surrounded by high mountains and numerous islands in Adriatic Sea. I had the best of two very different worlds and maybe that's why I am in love with the Alps and high mountains. Probably why I spent years of hunting in mountains 900-1800m and always wanted to go higher. Wild boar, bears, wolves, chamois, deer and birds were in my sight and still are, but my dream was slightly different. Here the main trophy was the Mid Asian Ibex from Kyrgyzstan, the most glorious and biggest of all wild goat subspecies. Not easy having that dream for three decades! The culmination of this was my 2013 trip with Simon Barr (Tweed Media) and Craig Coote MD of EVO Leisure (AKA Third Eye Tactical) to hunt Ibex.

THREE AMIGOS!

We were on the main road from the airport in Bishkek, the capital city of Kyrgyzstan, to Naryn, a provincial center in central Kyrgyzstan. It was 12 hours from the UK and another 10 by road to our camp in the Tian Shan mountain range. Most of the time we were driving on the gravelly road abused by harsh weather for centuries. It is the part of an ancient route called The Silk Road connecting Europe and Asia for more than 2000 years, at one point we reached 3030m.

It was the highest road I've ever been driven on. First we had to get all the tags

and documents for the hunt. On our way we tried some of the local traditional delicacies such as horse milk and hard cow cheese. The paper work took us half an hour then it was off to our base camp at 2600m. Shortly after we went off-road meeting nomads on horses and their livestock around traditional houses called Jurtas. Finally we arrived to our base made of two old rail wagons and was greeted by our host Joke and a few other members of staff. The adrenaline kicked in and suddenly we weren't tired anymore, we just wanted to check our rifles and go chasing our dream trophies.

FIRST FOREIGN HUNTERS

We unpacked and went to check our rifles and scopes for tomorrow's expedition. We were the first foreign hunters ever in this part of Kyrgyzstan and very quickly locals who were also our guides surrounded us.

They didn't want to miss the opportunity seeing our powerful rifles and scopes on the range. Simon used his Mauser MO3 in 300WM, Craig his BAT 300 RUM custom. I had my Browning A-Bolt Eclipse with a Christensen Arms carbon fibre barrel in 300WM topped with the big Kahles 624i. For observation I had a set of Swarovski's 10x42 EL Range laser rangefinder binoculars, the loan of both optics was kindly arranged by Editor and my long term friend Pete Moore! It took us some time to re-zero to the much higher altitude than at the WMS range in Wales were we first set up our guns. The locals enjoyed our shooting and some of them had



They do things different out in Kyrgyzstan; two plucky Brits and one crazy Croatian take part in the hunt of a lifetime



Lovely digs! Left to right Simon who looks like he's had too much vodka, Craig and the ever smiling Tomo Svetic



Tomo's A-Bolt with Christensen carbon barrel, glass went to a Kahles 624i scope and Swarovski's 10-x42, EL Range laser binos

a go too. Confident with our equipment we were ready for some local dinner, planning our hunt drinking vodka and sleeping in basic but comfortable rooms.

DAY ONE

It was 5 am and breakfast consisted of a very tasty tea or caj. We checked our equipment and backpacks once again, had a brief chat and it was time to go. We were ready to go hunting and stay in the mountains for a few days. Our horses were packed up with so much gear that I wondered if they would cope. I am a big guy and they were smaller and calmer than our European breeds. In Kyrgyzstan however, size matters little as it's all about stamina and endurance!

Horse riding was new to me while Simon and Craig had some experience. It was amazing on that frosty morning riding with our rifles on our back through streams and canyons in such spectacular surroundings. On our way we picked up a few guides and the convoy moved uphill. In the afternoon we reached the cave we would spend the night in at just 3500m! Even though we stopped twice, to rest the horses and stretch our legs more than 6 hours in the saddle riding narrow and steep trails was tiring but not as much as I expected.

Sometimes I thought my horse and I would end up rolling for hundreds of meters downhill ending my hunt before the start. I was very pleased when our guides told us that we will spend our day in the cave and spend our late afternoon observing Ibex positions close by. Soon we were looking from high peaks at animals which roamed cliffs below. The point with any goat hunt is



Browning A-Bolt Eclipse, Mauser M03 and the BAT custom, far left an old M1891 Moisin Nagant I bet it's killed more game than all the others put together?

that you have to use the terrain to your advantage and be higher than your prey.

Normally it works well giving you good advantage to check the animals, and plan how to get into shooting range without disturbing them! This type of hunting is considered one of the toughest and most challenging, as shooting is at longer ranges and target ID is all! That afternoon we saw females and youngsters, but no trophies, but still very exciting and enjoyable.

DAY TWO

We got up early and saw a few young males which were not what we wanted. At another position we located five big trophies, three of them very good! We tried hard to spot them

in the pine wood 650m below but our eyes couldn't find them, our guides were observing them in excitement and doubtless questioning our eyesight.

This is common on new terrain and on unfamiliar species and you need to adapt your eyes and brain. Craig managed to see a monster, but I was struggling while Simon was shivering under the strong sunlight. We were sunburned but all three of us didn't care because for the first time we were taking our positions around the ridge in anticipation! We had a plan and good spirit. A few hours later they changed their position but in opposite direction leaving us empty handed. Getting to our position was hard work and we had a long walk down steep cliffs to meet our horses and guides. By a spring we had a good rest, something to eat and time to discuss the plan. It was late afternoon and we decided to go to a local Jurta and from there to go by Lada Niva to our base and spend the night.

DAY THREE

We left the base in good spirits riding through the canyon on a frosty morning. The sun was getting higher and so were we. We got to the place below high cliffs where our scouts Nurlan and Koko noticed high above us some Ibex. We needed a few minutes to get them in our sight and I was so excited seeing the trophies we were after. My first proper Mid Asian Ibex looked impressive. Unfortunately they were 1000m+ away and he had the advantage over us, so we had to climb to a better position. For Ibex it was time to go to sleep, for us it was time to get to the best position before late afternoon when they start moving again.



Top of the world ma! This picture gives some idea of the terrain and the difficulty of getting close enough to your quarry



Simon with guide negotiating the trail, one slip and you are definitely in the s...t!



Best foot forward! Craig looking a little tired behind one of the guides who seem to take everything in their stride, well they do live there!

A bit like the wild west only a lot higher up; hunting on horseback how cool is that?



► A few hours of riding was rough but climbing to the ridge over 4000m high was scary. It was so steep that our horses were sliding back and we had to climb on foot which was hard work. We made it to the top and we were so happy that we conquered the biggest obstacle between us and our prey. Now it was time to ride to the ridges above the animals we saw earlier.

Our guides picked three different points to observe and we were left with one guide. We were observing and whispering about chances of getting at least one trophy when our main guide – who we called Geronimo - galloped to us saying: “Teke, Teke, big Teke”. We jumped ran to our horses and followed him for 700m. That was the place where they spotted some trophies.

We stalked in prone, and saw a group of five animals, one very big and two massive. In mountain hunting you have to use the first available chance if you like the trophy; so we decided that we will try to shoot all at once at three different animals. They were moving uphill and separating giving us chance for safe shooting. I was so excited I needed some time to calm

down so see the illuminated crosshair of my Kahles 624i scope. My Swarovski 10x42 EL Range laser rangefinding binos gave me the reading of 268m corrected distance for an angled shot.

TRIPLE ECHO

We adjusted our turrets and were ready to shoot at 270-300m. Craig started counting. One, two, three; boom, the triple report cut the air. Craig hit his hard and it went down, Simon missed due to muzzle brake blast from 300 RUM, I hit mine too but... Craig’s lbex got up and moved higher, Simon’s and mine were running. Mine went lower down the cliff and I fired two times more to stop him. One bullet left in my chamber and I was just about to take a shot at the lbex walking slowly downhill when Craig fired a second round sending the massive beast down.

Our guides said that two are down for sure even though only Craig’s trophy was lying below a big boulder. Three guides and Craig went downhill to get closer to his beast and two of us were waiting for the news. The one down had two perfect hits in the chest by Craig’s 300RUM and long blood trail. On mine the 180-grain Nosler BT didn’t penetrate enough and there was no blood

trail. It was late and we had to go to sleep. Warm tea and noodle soup helped us to get through the frosty night. I couldn’t sleep thinking of my excellent shot with poor bullet performance and the biggest trophy there, always lessons to be learned even by good hunters!

We will have to leave it there for this month, find out what happened when we carry on next time.

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