



with TJ Schwanley

## SPIKE CAMP MUSINGS

### Hunting South of the Border



Big mule deer are found in several southwestern states.

**W**hile Albertans are blessed to live in one of the most game-rich regions of North America, there exists a little bit of wanderlust in all of us. And, when that wandering can be done on a budget, it becomes too attractive for most to resist. What many hunters don't realize, however, is that some incredible opportunities exist just south of the border not only for some more exotic species, but also for some true trophy specimens. And, in most cases, a guide is not even required for those that want to go it on their own. For those that desire the assistance that local knowledge offers, guides can be hired at very reasonable rates. Truthfully, the hardest part of most of these hunts is drawing a tag, but unless you throw your name in the hat, you will never have an opportunity.

I apply for about 17 permits in the western United States each year. These include desert bighorn, elk, mule deer and antelope but opportunities exist for several more species, including whitetails, Rocky Mountain bighorn, California bighorn, Coues deer, javelina, mountain goat, oryx and even ibex.

There are some truly unique hunts in the southwestern U.S. I have used the services of United States Outfitters ([www.uso.com](http://www.uso.com)) to do all my applications for me for the past 15 years or so and in that time I've drawn New Mexico and Arizona elk tags, and Utah and Arizona mule deer tags. I've also built up some valuable preference points for desert sheep in particular, and hope the draw gods smile on me one day soon.

There are a number of application services in the United States that, for a small fee, will put all of your draws in for you and ensure that you are applying in the best units. They tailor your applications to the type and quality of animals that you wish to hunt for and they keep you apprised of new opportunities as they arise. Individuals may also apply on their own through each state's website but it can be a bit complex if you aren't familiar with the areas and species.

Application fees range from a few dollars to several hundred depending on the state, species and whether you wish to purchase bonus points to increase your odds of drawing. Some states also require that you include the tag fee with your application. This can run into hundreds and some cases thousands of dollars but the money is refunded if you are unsuccessful. With hunts for desert sheep selling for \$40,000 to \$70,000 in Mexico, even fronting a refundable tag fee in the U.S. is a good bargain.

States that offer non-resident draw opportunities include Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington and Wyoming, with Arizona, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming being the ones that most Albertans want to hunt. These states offer some of the best

#### WESTERN U.S. DRAW DEADLINES

<b>Arizona:</b>	Feb -	Elk & Antelope
	Jun -	Sheep & Deer
<b>Montana:</b>	Mar -	Elk & Deer
	May -	Sheep, Moose & Mountain Goat
<b>Nevada:</b>	Apr -	All Species
<b>New Mexico:</b>	Feb -	Oryx
	Mar/Apr -	Other Species
<b>Utah:</b>	Mar -	All Species
<b>Wyoming:</b>	Jan -	Elk
	Feb -	Moose, Sheep & Mountain Goat
	Mar -	Antelope & Deer

trophy potential for elk, mule deer and antelope and of course, Arizona, Nevada, New Mexico and Utah all offer desert bighorn. Montana offers some very long-odds draws for exceptional bighorns that few Albertans take advantage of. I know one fellow from Calgary that drew one of these tags last year and took a phenomenal ram.

Each state has different application deadlines with some starting as early as December but the bulk seem to fall from January to March with a few not due until June. Some states even have staggered application periods that are species dependant. In a nutshell, above are the deadlines for the western states.

With some tags becoming increasingly difficult to draw in Alberta, many hunters are looking south for additional opportunity. With drastic cuts to Alberta's antelope tags for example, residents could be looking at a



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decade or more between drawing tags but can often draw in Wyoming or Montana every year or two and hunts are relatively easy to self-outfit.

I know of several Albertans that head down every couple of years; some on self-guided hunts and others working through an outfitter but even in that case, costs are only around \$1,500. It's excellent value when you consider the scarcity of antelope tags at home.

**Oryx, while native to Africa, can be hunted in New Mexico.**

Alberta's top elk areas are also very tough to draw tags in and as interest grows, some areas may statistically become a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. While quality elk zones in the U.S. may not offer much better odds of drawing, at least by having your name in the hat in four or five different locations, you increase your odds of drawing a few tags in a lifetime. While you never used to see an American outfitter at sportsmen shows in Canada, as our



This usually takes a couple of months but it is valid for a year, so I suggest completing one every year for your rifle or shotgun and having it ready to go just in case.

Although it's always wise to check with customs on both sides of the border, bringing game back is a relatively simple process as well. Typically, your licence is all that is required by the state and you should stop in at U.S. customs before leaving the country to get a federal export permit.

If you haven't been applying for tags south

of the border, the time has never been better. Start by contacting a licensing service or visiting the various state websites and the dreaming begins. Even if you don't draw a permit for a few years, you can start building valuable bonus points and there are some over-the-counter opportunities as well.

There's little doubt that tags are going to become harder to get each year in Alberta and with talk of making sheep hunting more restrictive in the province, having some other irons in the fire may just not be a bad idea. ■

## ANTELOPE



With wait times stretching into 10 years and longer in Alberta, hunters are looking south to hunt antelope. - Rob Miskosky photo

draws become ever-increasingly restrictive, Albertans are traveling more and more to hunt and U.S. outfitters are capitalizing on this. I know one Wyoming outfitters that sees 25% of his business coming from Alberta.

With Alberta's pheasant woes, many pheasant hunters are also traveling south to pursue their passion. States like South Dakota and Montana welcome the boost to their economies this influx of hunters brings.

Turkey hunters too are traveling south in large numbers with favoured destinations being Montana and Wyoming. One Wyoming outfitter that I know is only charging \$500 for a turkey hunt and is really focusing his marketing in Alberta. Drawing a turkey tag in Alberta could take 10 or more years so many hunters are jumping the cue by heading south.

Crossing the border into the U.S. with firearms, whether flying or driving, is a relatively painless process. Form 6N1A must be completed and approved in advance.

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### Tundra Series



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YR15W	15 Qt. Roadie	17.5 x 12 <sup>3</sup> / <sub>8</sub> x 12 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>4</sub>	10 lbs.
YR25W	25 Qt. Roadie	20 <sup>5</sup> / <sub>8</sub> x 14 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>8</sub> x 13 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub>	15 lbs.
YT35W	35 Qt. Tundra	21 x 15 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> x 15 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub>	17 lbs.
YT45W	45 Qt. Tundra	25 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> x 15 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> x 15 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub>	22 lbs.
YT65W	65 Qt. Tundra	30 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> x 17 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>8</sub> x 16 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>4</sub>	27 lbs.
YT85W	85 Qt. Tundra	35 x 17 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>8</sub> x 18	32 lbs.
YT105W	105 Qt. Tundra	30 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> x 19 x 19 <sup>3</sup> / <sub>4</sub>	33 lbs.
YT120W	120 Qt. Tundra	40 x 19 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>8</sub> x 18	39 lbs.
YT155W	155 Qt. Tundra	44 x 19 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>8</sub> x 21 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>4</sub>	45 lbs.
YT250W	250 Qt. Tundra	55 x 22 x 21 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>4</sub>	77 lbs.

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