

## WYOGA HUNTING STORY CONTEST WINNER

# First Day Trophy Lion by Ann Byers

BIG GAME HUNTING

I first visited Lander, Wyoming when I was seven years old. Even then I thought it was an amazing place with Sinks Canyon, red cliffs, and the Wind River Range. I visited relatives again over the years and when I had the opportunity to come to Wyoming on a mountain lion hunt I jumped at the opportunity.

For a year my buddy Wayne had been telling me stories of his mountain lion hunts and adventures, with guide Marshall Balzly. He described the hunts in detail and I asked him once if he thought the adventures they encountered were supposed to entice me into going or scare me into saying no. The stories of steep canyons, deep snow, and long trails didn't deter, they made the hunt sound even more enticing. So when the opportunity came in January 2014 we headed to Lander for a mountain lion hunt.

The first morning, before dawn, we loaded the dogs and gear into 4-Runner and hit the trails looking for tracks. The first rays of sun broke over the mountain as we zig zagged our way up the trail. We reached the top and chained up to press further up the trail in search of tracks. A couple of hours passed and no fresh tracks.

Marshall received a phone call from some friends whose dogs had started tracking a

lion earlier that morning but had lost its track. They had lost the track in the canyon where we were heading next. We checked the rim of the canyon for tracks and found none so Marshall made the call to let the dogs loose with the hope they would come across the lion's path. The dogs boiled from the 4-Runner and took off into the canyon.

A few minutes passed and then the quiet was broken by the bay of the dogs. "They've found tracks." Marshall said. A few more minutes passed and the howl/bark of the dogs came again and again. We followed quickly along the canyon rim, the dogs barking/howling below. The dogs were ahead of us now but the howls were not getting further way, they had a lion treed.

We dropped from the sage brush and rock outcrop ridge top down into the steep canyon. Sliding down through the knee deep snow, between boulders, brush, and pine trees. We would slide down ten to twelve feet, walk along a brushy ledge, and then drop another time. The dog's howls echoed below. As we made our way along another ledge the mountain lion came into view. He was almost directly across from us sixty feet up in an enormous dead Douglas fir tree. His eyes moved from Marshall, to Wayne, to me, watching without fear. I had no shot from

the ledge so Marshall and I slide down to the next ledge and got set up for a shot. By now the lion was pacing around in the tree and I still had no shot, there were too many branches in the way and he was on the opposite side of the tree.

"He's getting ready to jump, he wants out of that tree. If you get a clear shot take it." Marshall whispered. I had the crosshairs following the lion's movements and no sooner had Marshall finished speaking and my shot rang across the canyon.

In an instant the lion crashed from the tree falling dead into the snow below. I've been blessed to have the opportunity to enjoy many outdoor adventures and shooting a trophy mountain lion of a lifetime, on the first day of a hunt will forever stand out as one of the greatest. 🦁

