



## HUNT STORY

### **2002 Wolf Hunt Stu Turner & Tom Sather**

Tom Sather, an eye doctor from Bozeman, and I hunted with Del and Fred Estlin (Del's assistant) from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> of January 2002. Let me tell you a little about the hunt from my perspective.

First, I totally relied on the recommendation of Tom, who had some knowledge of the outfit and hunt type. Tom and I have hunted together for more than 10 years, taking some really nice animals. Tom is a well-equipped, mentally tough and dedicated hunter with discriminating taste. He outlined the hunt and said, "it's the real deal".

I know next to nothing about wolves. I have hunted in British Columbia (B.C.) twice, found tracks, scat, and a fresh moose kill one time, heard them one time but yet never laid eyes on one. In Alaska in 1999, I hunted Caribou on the Mulchatna, saw a nice griz but no wolves. Here, I do some predator control work on the side especially right now at lambing/calving time. I mostly call, track some when the snow is right and take 50-65 a year during the season. I have taken many black bear, including some over 6.5' still looking for the true 7' bear...do have a super color phase chestnut red boar with fabulous fur, it went over 6.5' green....

So I had some modest expectations....good equipment (clothes and optics/rifle) and was fully charged up. Tom and I flew into Edmonton, rented a Durango and drove the 5 hours to Del's house, arriving about 6:30 p.m. After a brief visit, Tom settled in there, Del dropped me off at assistant guide's house, Fred Estlin. Fred had his truck all loaded to go, including trailer with 2 snowmobiles and toboggan trailers. We drove about 140 kms south to a place above the Cutbank River, unloaded gear, packed the sleds, and made for the cabin about 3 kms in. When we got there we were surprised it was a new, nice, large spot which included a sleeping loft, large airtight stove, propane to cook, etc. We were in the sack sawing logs by 11 p.m.; up at 5 a.m., giant breakfast, then onto the sleds. We took a 45-minute ride, parked and walked the last 700 yards to the hide. The blinds are super nice; insulated about 8x10' with propane stoves. It's harder than the dickens to sit in there all day, but Fred and I visited very quietly off and on and kept things interesting. TONS of ravens working the bait. About 5:10 p.m. 2 ravens in the timber beyond the bait lit out making a really different sound, All day long they had been



squawking, like a bunch of old ladies at a laundromat. This was different. I used my 8x30 Swarovski Binocs to see movement – an ear flick about 20 feet inside the timber. Watching, I saw it materialize into a dark gray wolf, which turned and walked to the left. I picked up the rifle - a mid 60's L-579 Sako in .220 swift with a Leupold 4.5x14 scope....cranked it up, and picked up the wolf as it turned to look seemingly right at/thru me.....put a bullet in the heart, that that....60 grain Hornandy SP at 3,800 FPS is a real stunner, does well on deer and antelope if you pick your shots. Pretty cool crossing the meadow to recover the wolf, two or more others in the immediate (within 200 yards) vicinity were really putting the howl on me...makes your hair stand on end, let me tell you it was dark by then....

Day 2, took some pics, skinned out the wolf, ran a part of the trap line with Fred. Saw FRESH Fisher, Lynx, Moose and WOLF tracks. One lone set of wolf tracks we crossed three times...

Day 3, back in the hide...it snowed like the dickens the night before, about 6" new, but the sun came out, blue skies it was POSTCARD PERFECT. At 10:50 a.m. I was binoc scanning the far side of the large meadow in front of me when a large, black wolf jumped into view. Vision was outstanding, and it seemed like the yellow eyes were boring laser holes in me.... I froze, and watched with binocs for the next two minutes as the wolf alternately trotted or lunged thru the snowdrifts working diagonally closer. I was very concerned about the swirling wind, so lased the critter when it stopped to puff at 302 yards....picked up the swift, and put a 60 grainer right thru the lungs. This wolf was hard to impress. It did a one jump 360, took off running hard. I could see red just behind the shoulder, but elected to shoot again, texas heart shot at 320, down for the count right now. Walked back for the sled, took some pics, loaded it up and made for the cabin...more pics and hung and skinned that afternoon.

Next day, I worked the trap line; overnight, then came back to town.

Last day of the hunt I asked Fred to accommodate my desire to call in some coyotes, as those I had seen were ENORMOUS and VERY heavily furred. At the first stand I had a very large male immediately in front at about 15 yards. Across a frozen lake came the female from a half km or further...the male waited for her, and when she got within 100 yards I stopped her with a bark, and shot her. The male I took was running flat out at about 75 yards.....

At the second stand, I saw a large male about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a km across a frozen lake. He worked back and forth on the far shoreline but would not come in. I sat quiet long enough for him to get bored and walk off. It was VERY cold about 33 below C and snow. I walked back to the rig, drove all the way around the lake, set up downwind and called in the above coyote...along with a great horned owl. Took the large male at about 125 as he was posing for me on the ice no cover for some distance....What a great hunt!

**Overall, here is my assessment of the whole deal.**

**Gear** very good to excellent. Sleds ran fine were not beaters. Accommodations for Tom and I both good. Blind set ups are ECELLENT. Perfect shooting ports, chairs, variable heaters....quiet, well situated and comfortable.

**Grub** was good to excellent, lots of it. I do my fine dining in the big city and just want some cal's for energy, but this was above average stuff – french toast, pancakes, bacon, sausage, eggs every morning..

**Location** – excellent. Wolf hunting is 99% in the set up and hunters' combination of patience and vigilance. This is hard to do. Wolves are hard to hunt. Cover a lot of ground and make VERY FEW MISTAKES.

**Shooting rages** – most baits/openings are within 200 yards, with a benchrest, NO EXCUSES for missing.

**Canadian Customs/Firearms laws** – this gets a slightly better than passing grade. Customs officials were very polite, patient and helpful, but search almost everything very diligently. I got a bit pale when the surgical gloves went on, but kept my virginity. It seemed they were at least as interested in the knives I packed as the guns. \$50 Canadian for the fee, form is good for 1 year.

**Getting to the site** - I would recommend the jet service direct to Grande Prairie rather than the 10 hour RT from Edmonton.

**I highly recommend this hunt with the following reservation:**

1. Get Fred as your assistant guide. He is smart and a persistent fellow, pleasant to get along with, a real enthusiast.
2. I think hunting is best after the baits have rested 2-3 weeks.
3. Weather is a big factor.
4. Use of EXCELLENT optics critical.
5. If you have the money to spare, this is the place to use the new lighted reticle scopes.
6. It takes a great deal of persistence and vigilance to see them when they come in.
7. YOU CAN'T MISS. Bring nothing larger than a .257 WBY, I think a swift or a .243 with the right bullets is the real ticket. I prefer Leupold scopes, think their 3.5x10 or 4.5x14 are the best for this work.
8. No screwing around. Slip into the blind early, stay quiet, don't leave, use the piss jug, don't leave until AFTER dark.
9. Finally, it takes a bit of luck. I think wolves are more difficult to take with certainty than ANY OTHER NORTH AMERICAN TROPHY. I highly recommend experience when calling coyotes, riding snowmobiles, and bring a good book to read. My system is to read 2 pages, put down the book, pick up the binoc and scan diligently. In this way time passes quickly and your glassing is more diligent and focused.
10. If you go in pairs, volunteer to pay extra to split up. The more sites you cover, the greater your chances of an encounter.

**Drop me a line or call at 509-627-6428** if you want to visit or have questions. Del is a great guy with a very good wolf set up. Even though my partner never actually saw a wolf, he was amongst them daily...and would go back in a heartbeat.

**Best regard,**

**Stu Turner**  
**Richland, Washington**

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