

# A Bull in a Day

**A Trophy New Zealand tahr on foot in a single day**

**BY TONY PIZZATA**  
PAGE DESIGN BY MEG BENHASE

held on the bull's chest, waiting for him to take a step forward. I began to lose the feeling in my fingers. *Just one step forward!* I mentally urged him on . . .

Each year around the first week of May, my obsession to hunt Himalayan tahr comes creeping back to haunt me. Hopelessly addicted to alpine hunting, I usually return for another adrenaline-pumping adventure. New Zealand's Southern Alps is home to arguably the best tahr hunting in the world. This year, we were working a privately owned block of land open to only two outfitters, and my good friend Brendan Matthews of Matthews Trophy Hunting was one of them.

Tahr numbers here were good and trophy quality excellent. Brendan assured me that only a few days before, another hunter had secured a good bull, and Brendan knew exactly where the herd was located. Although good bulls are scattered all over this property, he wanted to return to this particular mob because it still contained several mature bulls wearing horns well in excess of 12-1/2 inches in length. "The biggest problem we faced when I was in there last was which bull to take," he stated.

The following morning, we drove to the area, left the vehicle and climbed to the first saddle. From there, we worked our way up toward the valley the tahr were supposedly in. Finding a sheltered, rocky ledge above it, we settled in to do a little glassing. As in most alpine hunting,

a good vantage point allows you to glass for miles without having to move.

The Southern Alps of New Zealand – tahr country in particular – consists of numerous bluff systems; very steep, rocky gorges; boulders, shingle slides; and, to top it off, a good covering of snow on the tops. Himalayan tahr can be hunted by helicopter. The pilot locates an animal and then drops the guide and hunter off up high, allowing them to stalk in for a shot. Alternatively, hunters who are reasonably fit can hunt them on foot. I prefer the latter.

After glassing for a while, we finally spotted a group of tahr on the opposite face about two kilometers away, contentedly feeding on alpine moss on a rocky outcrop. A closer look with the spotting scope revealed a large mob of nannies with an immature bull. That male, Brendan assured me, was too young to control a harem of this size.

After hours of glassing, we finally spotted a mature bull among some rocks above the rest of the herd. He had been bedded down and remained motionless the whole time. I wanted to stalk in closer, but Brendan was adamant that other bulls had to be up there somewhere and suggested we keep glassing for them. Shortly thereafter, we did manage to spot several other bulls in this one's immediate area, tucked away in a sheltered gut. Satisfied we knew where all the bulls were bedded, Brendan suggested we could now make a move. My guide had proved to me once again that he knew exactly how



Typical for tahr and chamois just prior to winter.

to hunt these alpine dwellers. Local knowledge and reliability are what separate a good guide from an excellent one.

We gathered our gear and descended undetected through a rocky gut to the creek below. About an hour and a half later, we had humped our way up the opposite face and were now no more than 500 meters from where the tahr were feeding. The midafternoon sun had disappeared and fog was rolling in, dropping the temperature below zero. Polar fleece clothing at this time of year is a must, and I was also thankful I wore gloves. Judging by the clouds that were boiling up, we could get snow.

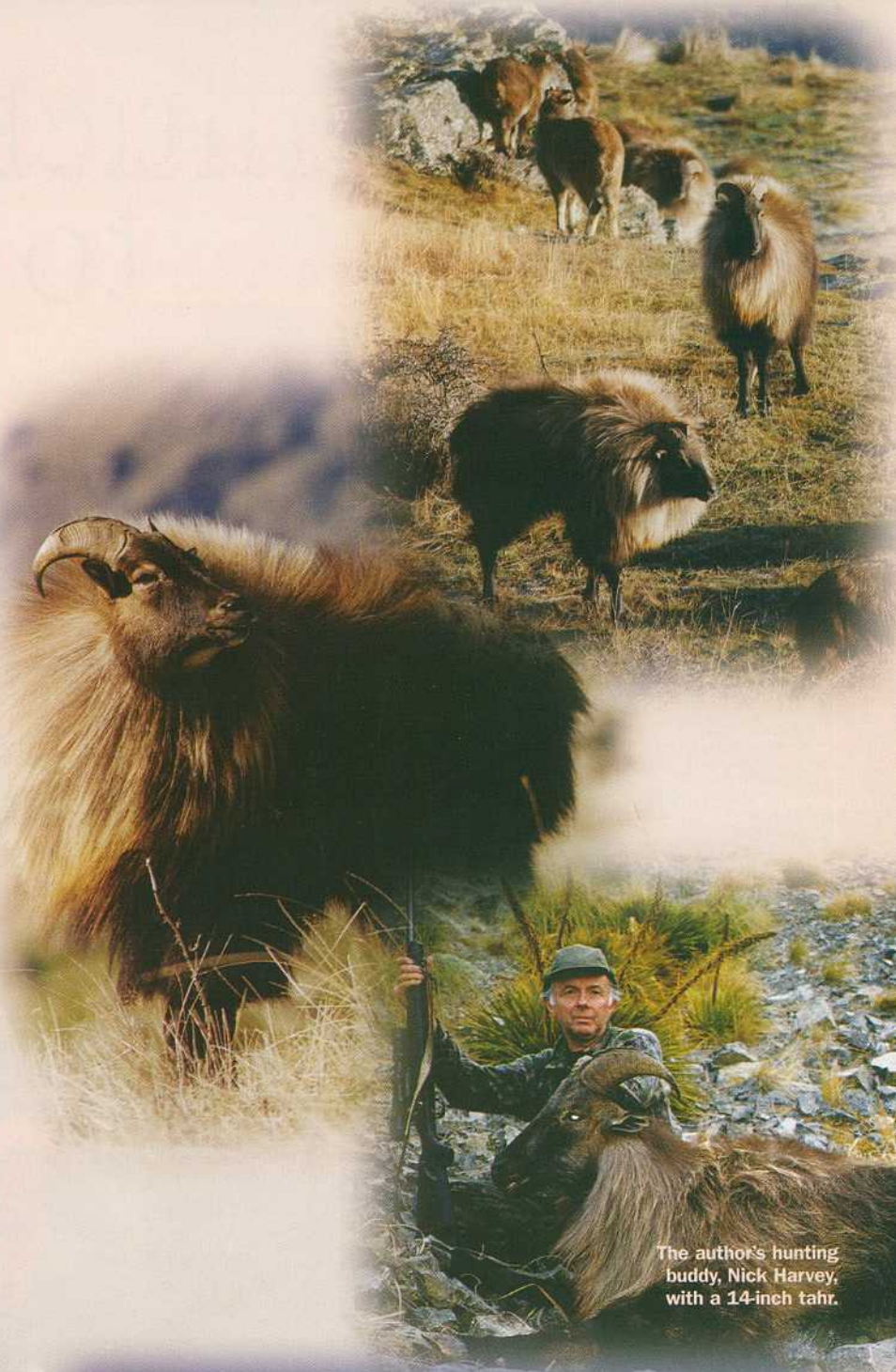
We edged our way forward and slithered into a narrow chute that led from the icy tops straight down to the creek bed below. Now only 200 meters or so separated us from the bedded bulls, and a game of patience began. Trying to get any closer would probably alert the bulls to our presence, for we had run out of cover. We simply had to wait for them to make the first move. Glassing revealed six bulls, and all had horns that we estimated at 12-1/2 inches long or better.

After a good half-hour, one bull decided to stand up, then another. The second had excellent horn length and a beautiful coat in full winter pelage. In no time, my mind was made up. I removed my gloves and closed the bolt on the .270.

"Wait for him to step away from the other bull," Brendan whispered. With a steady rest over my backpack, I held on the bull's chest, waiting for him to take a step forward. Seconds turned to minutes, and I began to lose the feeling in my fingers. *Just one step forward!* I mentally urged him.

Moments later, it was the other bull that made a move, leaving the old-timer behind. Instantly, I held firm on the big bull's shoulder and unleashed a 130-grain Hornady SP. Recoil momentarily disrupted my sight picture, but I was rewarded with the familiar thud of a solid hit. The bull collapsed instantly. The rest of the mob gathered in a bunch and looked in our direction. Then they charged uphill and over the top in no time. The nannies, too, had disappeared.

As we made our way across to my bull, Brendan and I relived the whole event. After a quick photo session, we caped the bull for a shoulder mount and headed for home. Down in the creek bottom, as we stopped to catch our breath, I looked back up into the tops we had just left and watched in awe as the clouds rolled in and engulfed the crags and rocky bluffs. I was thankful to my guide for a rewarding trip that resulted in a bull tahr whose horns later measured 13 1/2 inches in length. It's a rare hunt that brings you a trophy of this quality in a single day. 🐐



The author's hunting buddy, Nick Harvey, with a 14-inch tahr.



Author with his hard-won 13-1/2-inch bull.