

Fishing for Cham

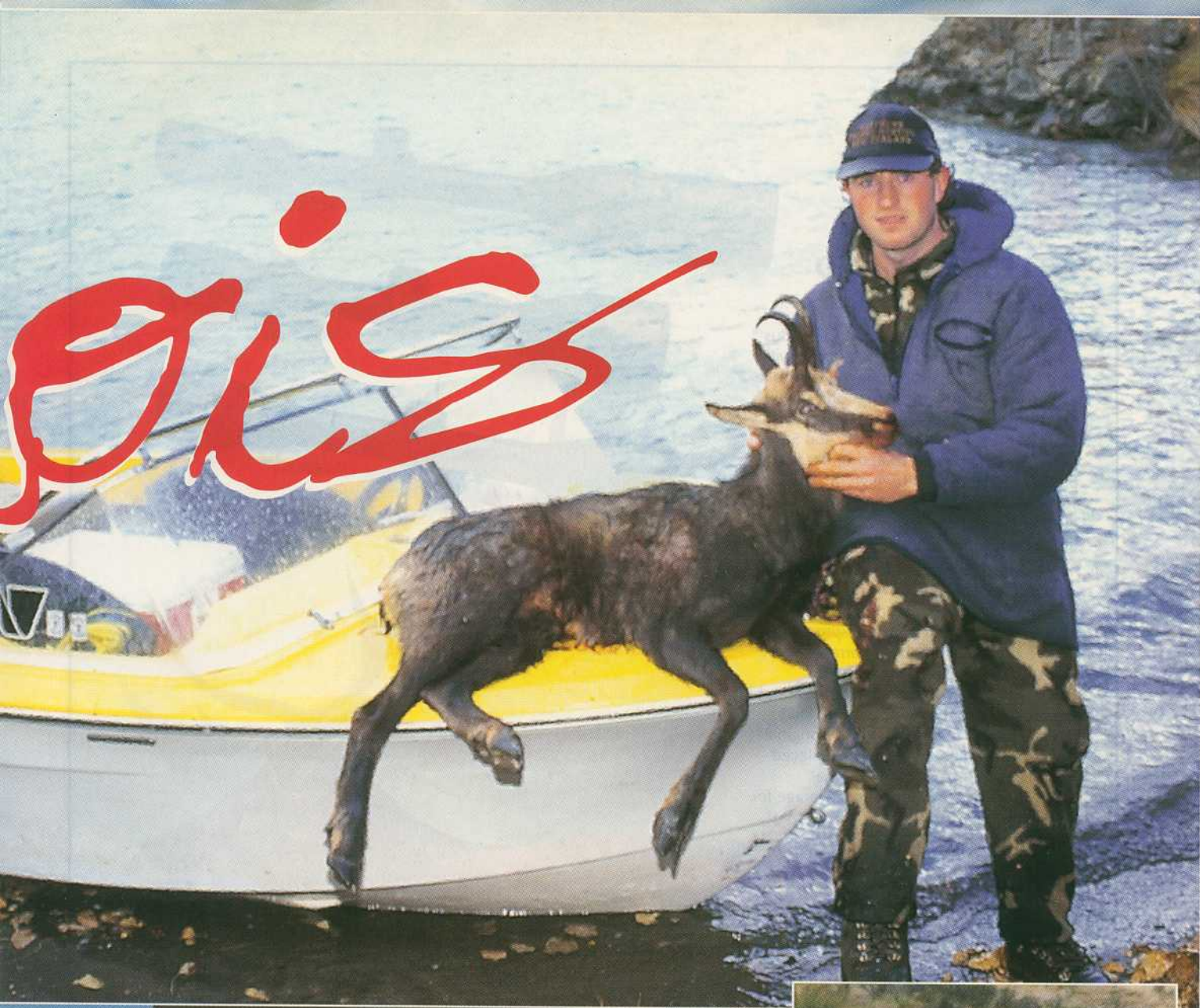
***Sporting Shooter's* keen as mustard and leave-your-wife-and-kids-at-home-for-six-months-of-the-year trophy hunter, Tony Pizzata, gives a fresh-faced New Zealand outfitter a try.**



MAIN PIC: Kiwi outfitter Brendon Mathews takes time out before heading home with yet another good representative trophy for his Australian clients. **LEFT:** Tony Pizzata (right) is real pleased at shooting his chamois — he needed the rest! **FAR RIGHT:** An impressive-looking chamois buck caught out in the open makes haste.



eris



This year for the second year in succession, Penrith, in Sydney's outer west, played host to Australia's Safari Expo, held each year by Safari Club International. Once again, *Sporting Shooter* was in attendance, and after setting up our booth, I decided to take a walk and catch up with a few exhibitors.

New to the Australian scene was *Mathew's Trophy Hunting New Zealand*. After a brief introduction to guide and outfitter, Brendon Mathews, I took a look through his client photo album. I was impressed to say the least.

Brendon was offering chamois, tahr and red deer hunts.

"What's your specialty Brendon," I asked.

"One day Chamois hunts by boat," was his reply. I pondered for a moment, wondering if he was pulling my leg. Thinking to myself, I've hunted the South Island more than a dozen times

now and this was definitely a first.

"What, have they learnt to swim?" I replied. Brendon proceeded to tell me of several areas he had that were only accessible by boat and hence had good numbers.

Although now living in Christchurch, Brendon is a former sheep and cattle musterer from South Canterbury and knows plenty of areas that contain good concentrations of chamois, not to mention tahr and reds. For the past three years he's been guiding on a full-time basis with an outstanding record of success.

My plan, the same every year, was to visit New Zealand the first week of May for a tahr hunt, which I had already booked. With this in mind I decided to allow a couple of days and give the chamois a go with Brendon. As I had planned to take a mate over with me I called him first to ensure he didn't mind. "Count me in," was Mick's reply.



Mick Formosa with his
8 1/2-inch chamois buck.



Returning to Brendon's booth I made the booking and looked forward to this hunt with a difference.

PRIMED AND READY

Just over two months later Mick and I met Brendon in Christchurch. The plan was to travel about two hours drive to his family property located in Waimate, South Canterbury and use the farm as a base camp. From there we would travel to the hunting area for the chamois hunt.

"If the weather turns bad we can hunt paradise ducks, mallard, wild goats and feral pigs on dad's place until it clears," he said. "He keeps the hunting exclusively for my brother and I and there's also trout and eel fishing on our 6km river frontage."

In no time we were away and managed to arrive at the farm just on dark. Little did I know we'd be staying at the homestead. As we pulled into the driveway Brendon's parents were there to greet us. After showing us to our rooms Mrs Mathews put on a baked dinner fit for a king. Home cooked meals and hospitality are a Mathews' family specialty.

The following morning we were up early and after a quick breakfast hooked the boat up and headed south. Brendon had the whole operation down to perfection and had the boat in the water just before sun up. It was a 14 foot jet boat powered by a Ford Capri V6 motor, which he also uses for

water skiing. After loading the boat with our gear we donned our life jackets (standard procedure with this guide) and were away. The lake was still and calm with barely a ripple. Within 20 minutes we approached what Brendon calls *chamois gully*. After securing the boat and unloading the esky and all our gear, Brendon pointed out the route we'd be taking.

Following a brisk 20 minute walk up the river bed, Brendon said we'd do some glassing as the chamois are often seen from this point onwards. Mick and I welcomed the break. Although we had both trained for the trip, we were still blowing the cobwebs out from all that city living. From this point onwards the rolling hills abruptly changed to steep rocky bluffs, grassy saddles and shingle fans — typical of good chamois country.

"We'll move up a little further," Brendon muttered. Sticking to Brendon's heels, both Mick and I were keen to see some action. Approaching another bend along the rough rocky river bed, Brendon slowed the pace to check for any sign of life around the corner. He signalled a stop. Now in full view was a steep but sheltered rocky basin. Before we had time to settle in for a thorough glass of the area, Brendon sensed movement.

"There's one coming over the top," he whispered, "and another and another, quick!"

Within moments about six dark objects were visible as we scrambled to get into

position for a shot. Brendon and I had climbed about 20m up the opposite face in an effort to gain elevation. Dropping my pack I quickly got into position and lined up on the first chamois that stopped. I could hear my daypack rolling down the hill, as the country was so steep.

"Forget the pack; get your crosshairs on that chamois," I remember thinking to myself. "How far mate?" I whispered.

"About 280... quick," Brendon replied.

Lining the chamois up I can remember another buck running in beside him, his horn length was well above the ears and definitely a better trophy, so I quickly changed aim and taking a deep breath held and slowly squeezed the trigger. The buck cartwheeled over the edge and into a small gut above a shingle slide, but was stone dead and in full view. Mick had another animal lined up and fired just after me but missed. Within seconds the chamois were a mile away and out of sight.

Sliding back into the creek bed we crossed over to the face my buck was on. Brendon was already half way up the 300m climb. As I approached my trophy, he had already pulled out the tape and was measuring the horn length, with a smile from ear to ear.

"It's a buck Tony and guess what? He's just over 9 inches, congratulations mate."

After several photos we decided to leave my buck in a safe spot and continue hunting to give Mick another crack at a chamois.



LEFT: Kia birds, a menace to any chamois hunter. FAR LEFT: Outfitter, Brendon Mathews, at the 1997 SCI Safari Expo. BELOW: Teaming with all sorts of game, the Mathews' hunting spread gave the author the chance to bag the odd waterfowl.

Brendon explained the head of the valley was about one and a half hour's walk up river and where the main concentration of animals were usually located. We continued up the valley at a moderate pace glassing likely spots from time to time. A little further and Brendon dropped to his knees, signalling us to keep low. "Chamois," he hissed. "On that next ridge, just below the top."

A quick glass revealed six chamois slowly moving across the face. Brendon led the way, followed by Mick, whose turn it was to shoot. We quickly dashed up the creek and around the next bend to where Mick could prepare for a shot. The chamois were momentarily out of view as we continued our scramble to close the gap. Brendon, whom I'm convinced is part mountain goat, was first on the scene and glassing as Mick and I arrived gasping for breath.

"Their gone...damn!" he said. "They've probably gone over the top again."

With the clouds rolling in and rain threatening we decided to call it a day.

By mid-afternoon we were back at the boat. Brendon had elected to gut the chamois I had shot and carry him out as he wanted the meat, knowing I only wanted the cape and horns. Within no time it was all aboard and anchors away. Although the lake was still quiet calm Brendon assured us we were in for a bit of rain, and sure enough, we barely had time to get mobile when down she came.

The following day we were away in much the same manner as our first and had anchored down before sun up. By first light we were approaching the area where I had shot my buck and Brendon said we'd wait for better light before going any further. No sooner had we got comfortable when a lone chamois came tearing around the opposite face at a trot. He was probably a buck due to the fact that the rut was in full swing and he was on his own. All we could do was watch him pass at about 300m above us on the opposite face. It was apparent he wasn't stopping for anyone.

"He's working his way down," Brendon motioned.



As the buck hadn't seen us, Brendon signalled Mick to stay close and make a mad dash up the creek to see if they could follow his intended movements. As we neared the next bend, Brendon said he caught a glimpse of something in the creek bed, heading across to the opposite face. He quickly propped and began glassing as Mick and I got into position to do the same. Pointing to a basin above where we were located, he rather calmly commented, "There must be twenty chamois in that lot."

Brendon seemed to always be a step ahead of us and that's what I suppose you'd expect from a first class guide. He certainly knew the area and where to look but never rushed his clients.

"Look, there's that buck."

The buck we'd seen had crossed the creek in front of us, destined for that mob of chamois. He was about 250m away from us and about the same distance again from the rest of the mob.

"Take him Mick," Brendon whispered. But Mick had already done his homework and at that instant let his Ruger do the talk-

ing. I can still vividly see the buck drop to its side as the rest of the mob made good their escape. Mick was over the moon to say the least and after much congratulating he and Brendon headed off to retrieve buck number two.

Mick's buck measured out at 8 1/2 inches with very heavy bases. The rest of the day was spent photographing and videoing as the pressure was now off for all of us. In fact after seeing more chamois, I'm confident we probably could have taken an extra animal each if we had so desired.

Returning to shore we loaded the vehicle and headed for home. In my books, Brendon's one day chamois hunts were an utter success and something I'd be proud to tell my mates about.

Brendon still has a limited number of one day chamois hunts available for 1998. He provides a pick-up and return service from Christchurch Airport and only charges for the days you hunt. For further details contact Brendon Mathews, Mathews Trophy Hunting New Zealand. Tel: 0011 64 334 93469 or fax: 0011 64 334 93472. ●