



**Author with his trophy
Bezoar Ibex from Turkey**

By Ben Sallaras

“I HEARD THE FAINT SOUND OF HOOVES SOFTLY PENETRATING THE SNOW, BUT IT WAS HARD TO JUDGE HOW FAR AWAY THEY WERE. I DIDN’T NEED MUCH TIME TO FIGURE THAT OUT THOUGH, BECAUSE ONLY A MOMENT LATER THE HEAD OF A MATURE BEZOAR IBEX BILLY APPEARED ON THE OTHER SIDE OF OUR ROCK, AT A RANGE OF ABOUT 12 METERS!”

Bezoar Ibex: *the one day hunt*

So close! I felt I could reach out and touch him on the horn. He stopped, peered around, but never once did he look at me. My bow hidden from his sight, I concentrated hard as I carefully adjusted my single pin back down to the 20m mark. He continued walking broadside to me and the other four billys materialised behind him. I instantly assessed them all, the biggest billy was still definitely at the front. I drew my bow, knowing full well that at this close range, they would immediately become aware of what was lurking so near.

Earlier in my life, I never imagined I would get the opportunity to one day hunt the majestic Bezoar Ibex. Arguably the most handsome of the Capra species; equipped with exceptionally acute senses, and inhabiting some of the most difficult terrain one could attempt to bowhunt in, the Bezoar is the type of species that captures the imagination of the vast majority of modern hunters. Due to the expense and difficulty of trying to hunt one, particularly with a bow, I had mentally crossed them off my list a long time ago. But out of nowhere, early in 2017 my name was drawn in a hunting club raffle, and suddenly I was making plans for my first visit to

Turkey. In total contrast to most of my overseas adventures, the events that occurred immediately before and after my hunt were more remarkable than those that actually occurred during the hunt, which turned out to be the shortest of my life – the One Day Hunt.

After a bow dry-fire mishap in Bulgaria in early December, resulting in irreparable damage to my beloved Xpedition bow, I was in need of a new one, which I was due for anyway. The great folks at Xpedition Archery had a new Denali on its way in no time. Due to the fact I wouldn't be returning home to Australia prior to my hunt in Turkey, I had the new bow (and replacement parts for the old one) posted to Greece where I was working. What a horrific error that turned out to

be. I had an absolute nightmare of a time getting the bow and parts through customs, the language barrier and complex Greek laws only complicating things further. Although the package landed in Greece around Christmas time, it took three weeks of frustrating back-and-forth communications with Greek Customs to finally get it released. In the end, my good friend and keen bowhunter Kostas Papadopoulos came to the rescue – in Greece it's often about who you know, not what you know. Thanks to Kostas working his magic at the last minute, my bow arrived with just one week to spare prior to leaving for Turkey. Not ideal preparation at all, especially for a hunt where longer shots would most likely be a necessity. I was very nervous about the situation, but relieved that at least I had a bow

to hunt with.

After spending two days at Kostas' home shooting range, I had the bow shooting sweetly. I was grouping well out to 80 metres, the new single-pin sight I was using for this hunt made a substantial difference to my accuracy at longer range. After some nervous weeks, finally I could take a deep breath and relax a little, as I suddenly found myself on the plane to Istanbul then on to Adana in south-eastern Turkey.

The moment I shook Cüneyt's hand at Adana airport, I knew we were going to make a great team. He was a confident, professional, courteous guy, and after swapping a few hunting tales on our journey north into Turkey's interior, it became quite obvious he'd seen



his fair share of epic bowhunts in his time, having guided many accomplished bowhunters to dream trophies across Asia. We arrived at a modest, comfortable guesthouse in a small village late at night, the moonshine reflected off the snow-covered landscape all around us. After a stressful month at work, and the nightmare of getting my bow, it was quite surreal to finally be in those mountains, about to hunt possibly the most difficult species I might ever take on with the bow. It was a struggle to get to sleep, as my imagination ran wild contemplating the days to come.

I woke with a start, as the early morning Ezan (the Islamic call to prayer) echoed across the village from the nearby mosque, the first time I'd experienced it. I quickly established which part of the world I was in, and what I was here to do. I walked out to the kitchen area to find the guesthouse owner Ramazan glassing from the kitchen table. He signalled me over, I glassed alongside him and quickly spotted a group of four very nice billies literally 500m from our guesthouse, casually feeding on one of the lower slopes. I couldn't believe what my eyes

were seeing, as I absorbed my first encounter with *Capra aegagrus aegagrus*. While I was astonished and somewhat encouraged by this encounter without having left the guesthouse yet, the distinct lack of stalking cover of any description kept away any false notions that this was going to be easy....

After breakfast, the largest hunting party I'd ever been a part of took formation. We were a team of seven: Cüneyt (Head Guide); his brother Hasan (Assistant Guide); four game wardens present to officiate and witness the hunt, and

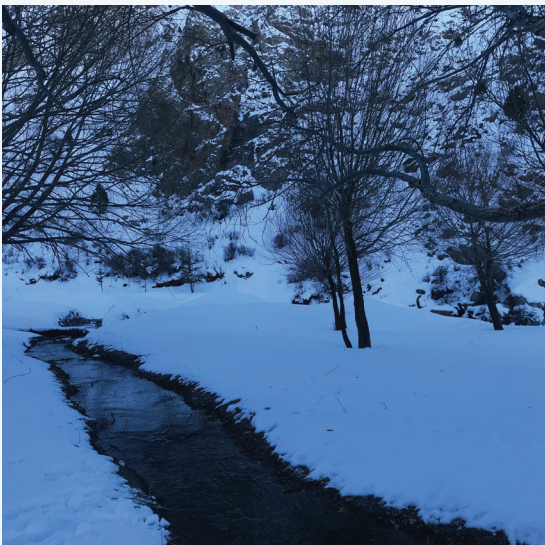
**Main photo: The majestic Bezoar Ibex of Turkey
Inset: Ben on a snow march with his guides to reach the Ibex**





myself. We headed up the main valley and in no time started spotting ibex up in the vertical cliffs above the road. As we travelled, I couldn't help but think about how tough it was going to be to get anywhere near one of those animals. Never in my wildest dreams, could I have imagined what was about to unfold on that very first day.

The guides and wardens knew of a well-used travel path the animals often used between two sections of mountain range, perfect for an ambush setup. The snow was littered with fresh tracks when we arrived at the spot, this looked like it could work to me, and I was keeping an open mind. Cüneyt, lead game warden Sadettin and I positioned ourselves in some rocks at the base of a vertical cliff, I could see many sets of fresh tracks within 80 metres of our position, the travel path the animals had been using recently was very obvious. We waited in silence as the sun elevated higher and higher, hoping for some ibex to cross from one mountain range to the other.



Within less than an hour, a group of approximately 30 ibex appeared in the cliffs to our right, descending the mountain and heading our way. I could not believe my eyes. Led by nannies and young, the billies tailed the group, and I could see some excellent specimens amongst them. In almost complete silence the group travelled past our position, I ranged them at 70 metres. Even though I had been practising at this range, it was further than my standard comfortable shooting distance. A mature billy, of around 110cm, stopped and stared in our direction, I heard the faint but stern whisper of Cüneyt advising me to shoot. But my instincts held me back, I never raised my bow and just watched them closely. As the group ascended the opposite cliffs undisturbed and left our view, Cüneyt asked why I didn't shoot. I explained I didn't feel totally comfortable taking that shot on the first day. He reminded me that chances on these animals weren't going to come easy with the bow, and strongly advised to take the next opportunity if one should present.



Still buzzing from my first close encounter with these majestic beasts, the adrenalin had barely faded when the next group appeared, following the same general path. This time, I promised myself, I would take the shot if the distance was right. A good-sized billy was the last to emerge, I ranged him once at 70m as he seemingly followed the same path as the previous ibex, from my perspective it appeared he was slowly edging further away as he travelled broadside from our position. He was walking quite quickly, and at this close distance I couldn't risk trying to range and re-range again, he would surely spot

the movement of me raising my rangefinder. My mind made split-second instinctive decisions - my pin was set at 70m but I had convinced myself he had expanded that out to about 80m. Instinctively I slowly raised my bow, drew, and let out my best goat bleat. Instantly he stopped and stared straight at our position, I placed my pin just above his shoulder, and got a perfect release. The arrow sailed out across the snow and passed over his shoulder exactly at the point of aim. He was still at 70m!

After retrieving my arrow, we analysed the previous five minutes. I was disappointed by my misjudgement, but also very encouraged by the fact we'd had two shot opportunities in the first hour of my hunt. Based on this, my hunting instincts told me were in with a very good chance of getting another shot opportunity over the nine days remaining.

After a delightful traditional lunch in a nearby village, including the customary multiple cups of tea, and some glassing through some beautiful mountain ranges, we headed back towards the area where we'd found action in the morning. Upon arriving, Cüneyt spotted a group of five mature billies quite high up in the cliffs, visibly making their way down to feed for the afternoon. A plan was quickly hatched, I could see Cüneyt was excited. He was confident he knew which general path they would take as they descended the cliffs, and told me, pointing up, "We need to get up to there, let's go!"

Cüneyt, Sadettin and I marched

up through the thick snow, it was thigh depth the entire way. The angle we took meant we were completely out of sight of the descending group of billies, but we had to move fast and get into position. After climbing for perhaps 30 minutes, we stopped and quickly discussed the few options for cover we had available. Cüneyt and I decided on a snow-covered rock, we dug into the snow and made ourselves snow nests to be fully covered by the rock and snow. Sadettin hid in some other rocks about 80m behind us. There was an open sloped snowfield to my right, and a sheer vertical cliff face to my left. Cüneyt predicted the ibex would follow this cliff face as they descended, I ranged it at 60m,

and quietly felt real confidence in our plan.

Only a few minutes passed when Cüneyt whispered "Here they come", I slowly peered around and got my binoculars on them, indeed they were coming, following the cliff face about 300m away, precisely as Cüneyt had predicted. We watched them from our snow nests, being ever so careful to remain unseen. As they reached the 200m mark, they were still heading in our direction, and I realised that this was about to get very serious. We decided to tuck into our nests and not dare peek around the rock again. I set my pin to 50m, ranged the cliff face again just to check, clipped my release on, and prepared



Far left and this photo: Using good optics is an absolute must for successfully finding ibex in the snow capped mountains

Allowing himself a good ten days to arrow an ibex, Ben's hunt was all over on day one!



myself to take one of the most important shots of my lifetime. Cüneyt reassured me via whispers that the best billy was the one in the lead of the group, he was to be my target.

I drew my bow, the movement at such close range set them all off,

and in chain reaction they began bounding through the snow, but it was so deep their movements were slow and deliberate. I lined up on my billy and placed the shot through his outside lung and through his spine, dropping him on the spot. He began to slide down the slope, I simply had to

reach out and grab him as he slid past. Then suddenly, I stared at Cüneyt, bow in one hand, back leg of an ibex in the other. He was absolutely stunned, no words came. A tremor of worry shot through me, had I shot the wrong animal? No, it was him, I think the shock of such a close encounter; a clean shot and kill, mixed with the potential for things to go wrong (in terms of shooting the correct animal) at such close quarters just stunned Cüneyt momentarily! We high fived; hugged, and sat in disbelief in the snow, admiring the gorgeous billy and stunning surrounds, where a dream had just come true.

Our hunting party reunited and the obligatory photo session followed, in the most ideal landscape possible. I felt like I was dreaming, my brain struggled to comprehend that my hunt was over, before the end of the first

The small Turkish village containing the guest house where Ben stayed. Ibex could be seen out the window!



day. It was a strange emotion to experience, as I had prepared mentally for this to be the single toughest hunt of my life, and had allowed myself 10 days to give myself the best possible chance of getting that one shot I needed. Now I was on my way back to the village with the most beautiful mature ibex in the back of the truck. After spending the previous month overseas at work, I was keen to get home, so rearranged my flights to depart the following day, promising to return without my bow to experience more of this alluring and intriguing country in the near future.

The hunt was the shortest of my life. I can't remember ever taking the target animal on the first day of a hunt, we just got lucky and played our cards right, as can happen on any given hunt. It just shows with a bow that if put yourself in the right places, and have a positive attitude, anything can happen. While it was a very strange feeling finishing the hunt so early, it doesn't happen like that very often, and I gladly accepted the outcome with open arms! **BDU**

BOWHUNTING BEZOAR IBEX IN TURKEY

If an archery Bezoar Ibex interests you, I can't imagine any reasonably adept, modern bowhunter going to the same location, during a similar season, with the same guide (critical) and NOT getting shot opportunities!

Cüneyt, as a bowhunting guide, is in a class of his own! For a man of his age he has guided an astounding number of successful sheep and goat hunts.

He knew the area, knew the animals, and hence was able to get us within bow range twice on the very first day. The proof is in the pudding as they say.

You can contact Cüneyt at

info@optimumhunting.com