

# SKILL



AN OUTDOOR JOURNAL

*special edition*

DAN COLI'S  
**BIG**  
T O M

A SANDY HILLS HUNTING PUBLICATION

SHHC  
FEB 2022



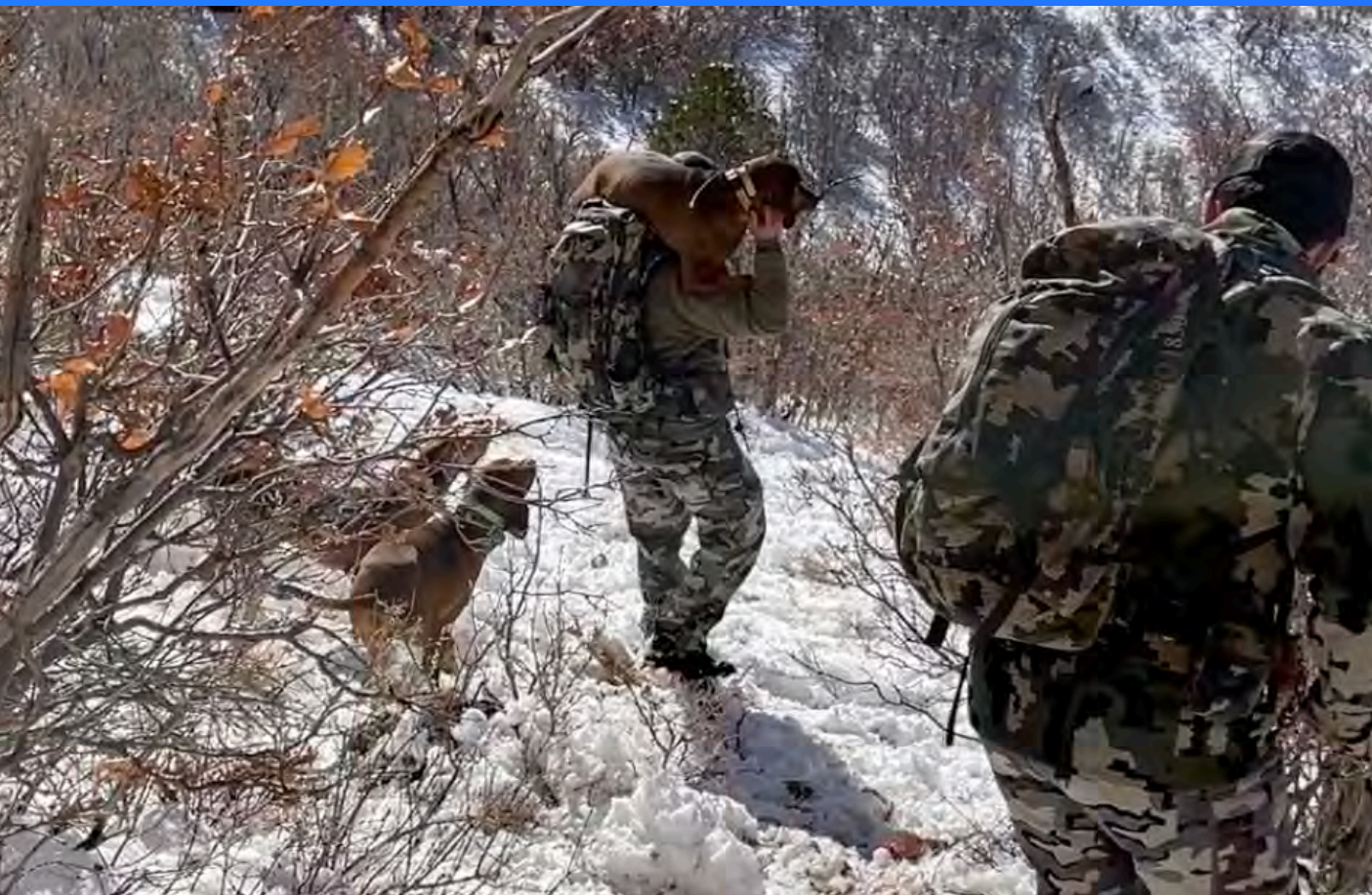
# The BARN CAT

Hunting and harvesting a mountain lion has always been a dream of mine since I started hunting. Being from the East Coast, I had never actually seen one in the wild which I think just added to their mystic.

Two years ago, while hunting mule deer on The Plains with Sandy Hills, I mentioned lion hunting to Neil and he said they could make it happen! When the season opened that following year, I was itching to get the call to go to Colorado, but unfortunately there was little significant snowfall early and I was in the middle of building my house. Unfortunately the quota closed before I could make it out!

This year was ripe with anticipation and I finally got the call! The weatherman was calling for 4-6 inches on New Year's Day and I needed to get out there and be ready to hunt the following morning.

The first morning of the hunt started early. Russell and Todd's crews hit the roads hard starting at 4 am hoping to cut a track. I rode with Neil and Rob and we covered additional ground. Teamwork was in full force! After cruising around for a few hours with no luck, we passed Todd, Gage, and the "Old Man"(Paul) who signaled us to turn around. We followed their vehicle to a rendezvous point and heard the good news! They had cut 2 lions....one with a significantly larger track than the other. The plan was to follow the track on foot for a little ways to see which direction the big tom was headed before we released the dogs. Shortly after setting out on the track Russell and Owen watched it disappeared into an old barn no more than 30 yards off the highway! They circled the barn twice and couldn't find any sign of tracks exiting. Could the lion really be in the barn? As much as we couldn't believe it to be possible, the boys told me to get my bow ready. My



adrenaline immediately spiked! This shit is insane! Shooting a mountain lion in an old barn with a bow? Is this really happening!? At the entrance to the barn Russell, Neil, Todd, Owen, John, Gage, Rob, the "Old Man" and I all stood in the doorway peering into the darkness. In that moment you could have heard a snowflake fall. Slowing people began to move. Armed with a pistol, Gage slowly slide off to the right and Neil slowly slid off the left wielding a 3' chunk of 2x4! At that point, I suggested getting my night vision, but Neil quickly reminded me that we weren't in New Jersey. Moments seemed like an eternity....and then Gage yelled "There he is!!!" The lion jumped out from under some old wood Neil was standing on, launched over some old timbers, and squeezed through a hole in the side of the barn! We all ran around the corner and watched the big tom bound up the hill. Luckily my father did not join me on this trip as he surely would have thrown a

grenade as he said, "You guys are nuts!!! I'm freakin outta here!!".

We ran to the trucks and quickly drove to the base of a tall ridge and quickly got our gear together. Russell and Todd released the dogs as the rest of us scrambled to get our gear. As we filtered through gear, we watched the dogs charge up the steep incline. Within minutes Russell yelled out, "There he is! He's at the base of the wall!". We watched as the lion attempted to make his escape along the large stone face, but the dogs were just too quick. In under 5 minutes he was overcome by the hounds. Russell and Todd made it apparent it was time to leave and "time to leave, now!!" A big lion on the ground can mean big trouble for the dogs. Regardless of what else we thought we needed, we were headed up the hill. The entire trip up the incline was overwhelmed by the sound of the dogs. No one was aware of the









situation that lay ahead. Once we reached to top, it was apparent all hell had broken loose. The lion was backed into a small hole at the base of the stone face and blood stained the fresh snow. The big tom had already got ahold of three dogs. We made the quick decision that the lion shouldn't be taken by bow. There was just no good way to gather the dogs and they weren't backing off the lion, so Todd handed me a rifle. Neil and I finished the approach to less than 15 feet and stood waiting for the dogs to clear. Finally, the dog in front of us cleared and I sent the first shot right through his front shoulders. Quickly Russell shouted, "HIT HIM AGAIN!!", so I gave him another.....and again Russell shouted, "HIT HIM AGAIN!!", so I gave him another! The dust settled and I was presented with all smiles. The words, "Good Shot, Good Shot!" echoed off the ridge to the valley below. HOLY SHIT!!! What the hell just happened? I've done some shit.....but this was up there!

We dragged the lion out of the hole and couldn't get over his size. His front paws were larger than my hands and it was a two-man effort to get him lifted into my arms! In it's entirety, the hunt took about 45 minutes from the time we found the track until the shooting was over. We were extremely fortunate. Once he got to the top and congratulated me, the "Old Man" said, "Sonny, I've been doing this for 50 years and I've never seen a hunt quite like that".

I would like to thank the guys at Sandy Hills Hunting Company for the opportunity of a lifetime and a special thanks to John for letting us take this beautiful lion off his property. See you in the fall for some more deer hunting!

Got 'Em!