



Catch-A-Dream

BY KEN ADKINS

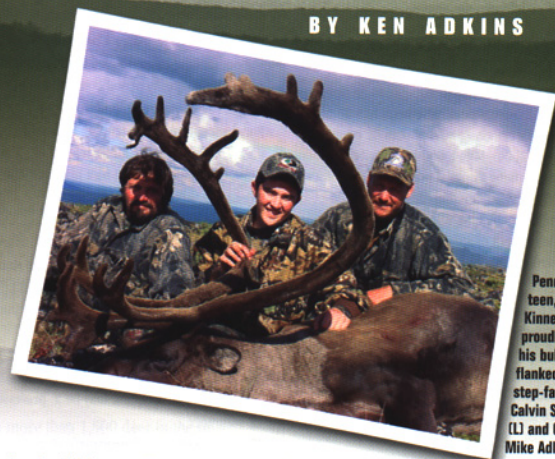
One day in May 2002, I was tying flies for the coming fishing season, and had the Outdoor Channel on watching Mossy Oak's "Hunting the Country." The show was about the Catch-A-Dream program, and they had a young hunter with a terminal illness enjoying his dream hunt. I had to stop my project and was fixed to the program until its end. I sat and thought for a time about what a great thing that was, then I started to think, "Here we are with a lodge in Alaska, we have a great group of friends who are also outfitters and guides...how hard could this be?"

The next day I called the number I found on the website for Catch-A-Dream. I talked with Dr. Marty Brunson, the chairman of Catch-A-Dream, about the possibility of sending a youngster up here on a trip. My wife, Ellen, and I were honored when we received the call a month later that they had a young man with an inoperable brain tumor who had a dream of hunting in Alaska. Word went out and the response was unbelievable. Numerous cash and in-kind donations were received and the hunt was on its way to becoming a reality.

This hunt occurred in the Revelation Mountains at Trophy Lake Lodge, owned and operated by David Haeg of Dave Haeg's Alaskan Hunts. I guide for Dave and specialize in brown bear, grizzly bear, black bear, wolf, moose and caribou. The hunting party on this "7-day combination Caribou, Black Bear and Wolf hunt," donated by Dave included me as guide, 17-year-old Tony Kinney, Tony's step-father Calvin Shifflett and Dustin "Shed" Whitacre from Mossy Oak Productions, who filmed the hunt for Mossy Oak's "Hunting the Country" television show.

On the second morning of the hunt we awoke to a clear and cool morning. On the last evening before we went to sleep, we watched seven bulls feeding around a tall butte in front of our camp, and in the morning they were back at it. After they fed around the other side, we were able leave camp and get after them. After making it to the butte, we made a blind stalk and, after reaching the other side, spotted a group bedded about 3/4 mile away on a jagged ridge. Little did we know that the bulls we actually saw in the morning were bedded only a few hundred yards away, hidden by a line of tall brush. We were planning our stalk on the far group of bulls when the closer bulls suddenly appeared. They arose and started feeding their way around another ridge. Both groups of caribou had nice racks, but the far group was bedded in a place that was difficult to stalk, so off we went after the group of seven bulls. It wasn't long before we spotted them again; they had made it to an area of large rocks and boulders about 1/2 mile away and bedded down. We then made our way, staying just below skyline, keeping their antlers in view. After making it to a large group of boulders, we watched the caribou and planned our final stalk.

Two of the bulls got up and began to feed. Then one of them started to watch in a direction away from us and soon



Pennsylvania teen, Tony Kinney, poses proudly with his bull caribou, flanked by his step-father, Calvin Shifflett (L) and Guide Mike Adlam (R).

the other did the same. From past experience, this led me to believe that it would be their next heading. I decided it was time to make our move. By using the large rocks and keeping the animals barely sky lined, we were able to swing around them and close the distance to around 75 yards.

I got Tony and Calvin into position to shoot, and Dustin was in position with the camera. So there we were, 75 yards from seven bull Caribou, out of cover, crouched, kneeling, and playing the waiting game. Although it seemed like an hour in that spot, it was closer to five minutes or so when suddenly, all of the bulls got up from their beds and started to feed. Then they started to head out in the direction that the lead bulls were watching. I told Tony which bull I wanted him to shoot, and I whistled to try and get them to stop. This normally works, but this time, they all did an abrupt left turn and were coming right at us, head on. What happened next was something that will be etched in my memory for eternity.

But perhaps most amazing was to see a herd of seven trophy bull caribou defy their own nature by spooking, leaving the scene headed for parts unknown, and then, inexplicably, stopping in their tracks, turning around, and returning to the original scene to ensure that Tony's dream was fulfilled.

The caribou approached to 15 yards, then spooked, ran back to where they were bedded, and disappeared over the ridge. That close and no clear shot at any one animal, since they were all stacked together while they moved off! We were all heart-broken at missing our chance, but still had some feeling of success in getting that close to the bulls after a long stalk. I had everyone stay put while I went to see if I could spot where they went after going over the ridge. I must have only gone 10 paces when a miracle happened. All the caribou came trotting back over the ridge toward us and stopped broadside less than 75 yards away. Dustin got the camera on the bull that Tony was to shoot, and Tony killed the Caribou with one

clean shot. Then Calvin got the nod to take his caribou and he quickly put his trophy down as well. Two caribou lay within 40 yards of one another. What an exciting, and miraculous, hunt!

As a professional big-game guide, this has to be the highlight of my career. Being involved with the Catch-A-Dream program and helping Tony fulfill his dream of hunting in Alaska is both an honor and a privilege that I will cherish forever. There were many amazing aspects of this special hunt — watching the hunting community pull together, actually being part of the dream fulfilled, watching a grizzly bear and a wolf fight over a free meal, seeing Tony harvest a magnificent male wolf, and capturing the whole experience on camera to be aired on national television. But perhaps most amazing was to see a herd of seven trophy bull caribou defy their own nature by spooking, leaving the scene headed for parts unknown, and then, inexplicably, stopping in their tracks, turning around, and returning to the original scene to ensure that Tony's dream was fulfilled.

But then, this was a Catch-A-Dream hunt Why should we be surprised? Catch the Vision!