



## EJIDO ALFREDO V. BONFIL

by Dennis Campbell

I was very excited to return to the amazing hunting area of **Ejido Alfredo V. Bonfil** in South Baja, Mexico. This particular Ejido is located in the huge **Vizcaino Biosphere Reserve**. This was the same place where I completed my first Grand Slam in January 1995. I knew many things would be familiar, but anxiously anticipated learning of the changes over the 15-year period since I had been there before.

The Ejido Bonfil is a land mass of well over 1,000,000 acres. The Ejido is made up of 142 members who own (manage) these lands. The Mexican government set up the Ejido system many years ago, and it seems to have worked out well. The Ejido members are not Indians, but simply Mexican citizens. The individual members can pass down the single membership to a family member, but only one membership is part of a family. In other words, children or spouses do not automatically become members. There are several Ejidos in South Baja, but Ejido Bonfil is one of the oldest, having been established in 1975.

There is a lot of confusion about the area where the desert sheep hunting takes place, which as explained above, is in fact controlled by Ejido Alfredo V. Bonfil and for all practical purposes is completely under their use and discretion. The Ejido is huge, but occupies only a small portion of the massive Vizcaino Biosphere Reserve. The Biosphere is the largest protected area in all of Latin America, with a land mass of 55,555 square miles. Its northern border is the division between North Baja and South Baja, with its

western border the Pacific Ocean and extending all the way to the Sea of Cortez in the east. The Biosphere was named after Spanish explorer and merchant **Sebastian Vizcaino**, who lived between 1550 and 1628. This area is not only home to desert sheep, but the Baja California pronghorn, mule deer, many different bird species, and at certain times on the Pacific coast, the monstrous gray whale. Amazingly, the Biosphere was not established until 1988, some 13 years after Ejido Bonfil was established.



The Ejido Bonfil Reserve encompasses some of the best desert sheep habitat in all of Mexico. The three most well-known mountains are Aguajito, La Reforma, and the Volcano of the Three Virgins (Volcan de las Tres Virgins). The "Three Virgins" gets its name from the three peaks of the mountain itself. It was on the Three Virgins mountain that I took my Grand Slam ram in 1995.

Grand Slam Club/Ovis was chosen to auction one of the Bonfil permits at our 2009 convention. **Wild Sheep Foundation (FNAWS)** has been awarded auction rights to five permits for the last few years, and for 2009 GSCO auctioned the sixth permit. The high bidder was **Jeff Murray** (NY). Initially it looked like GSCO



Dennis Campbell (#613, AL) completed his first Grand Slam with this desert sheep within the Ejido Alfredo V. Bonfil Reserve in January 1995. Dennis took this sheep on the Volcano of the Three Virgins. In the distance can be seen the mountain known as La Reforma.

18 GRAND SLAM #152

was not going to have a permit to auction for the 2010 convention. Finally, in January 2010, **Rolando Alonzo** (who handles the auction permits) called and said a seventh permit was available for the 2009-10 season, but the hunt had to be concluded by March 21, 2010. Since the GSCO auction was on February 20, this did not leave much time for a hunter to prepare. Long story short, when the auctioneer called "sold," I was the high bidder.

Rolando did his job well, and my rifle permit arrived by email on Monday, March 1. My departure was set for March 5. I flew to Los Cabos, South Baja; normally one would fly to Loreto, as that city is much closer to the hunting area, but all planes to that airport were full. Rolando Alonzo was there to meet me, and we whizzed through customs and rifle procedures easily. We then drove to La Paz, where Rolando lives, and my interpreter for the hunt, **Israel Barraza**, met us there. We left Rolando behind in La Paz, and Israel and I then drove to Loreto.

Loreto had really changed since I was there in 1995. The old hotel where I had stayed had been torn down, but some nice new hotels had sprung up in its place. The city was more modernized and had become much more of a tourist draw because of the great fishing and weather.

The next morning we headed north for Ejido Bonfil. Things at the main camp of the Ejido had certainly changed, just as in Loreto. In 1995 there were a couple of small shacks along the road; now there was a modern camp with all the amenities. There were several cabins with private bathrooms and hot showers. There was even an observation tower. The view is really nice, as one can see all three mountains.



The crew of Ejido Bonfil inside their modern lodge. Back row, second from left, is Jesus Vega, who is president of Ejido Alfredo V. Bonfil.



Several new cabins have been built at the camp where desert sheep hunts are conducted by Ejido Bonfil. The Volcano of the Three Virgins is in the background.



This ram of 179 3/8 SCI points completed a second Grand Slam for Dennis Campbell (#613, AL) in March 2010.

human was forced to walk, it was one of the toughest stalks I have ever made. For sheer difficulty, I cannot remember one tougher. There was no flat ground, as it was rocks and boulders all the way. From start to where I could shoot took four grueling hours.

The plan worked beautifully. We were out of sight all the way until the last ridge. The climb up the ridge was very steep and high. When we crested, we could not see the sheep as they were around a rock outcrop. Luis dropped down the ridge and motioned for us to come on down, as he had them spotted.

Once there, we crawled out onto a huge, flat boulder about the size of a large dump truck. Both rams were up feeding, but the big one was out of sight. Finally I could see the top of his horns, and slowly he fed to a perfect spot for a broadside shot. I had ranged them earlier at 295 yards and held the 300-yard dot right on him. I took a breath, held it, and squeezed off the shot. The ram went down immediately, and there were handshakes all around. Only Luis, Alfredo, Israel and I had made the final stalk up the ridge,



A boat was used for Dennis Campbell's (#613, AL) hunt with Ejido Bonfil.

After lunch, we packed up and went back south to Santa Rosalia to launch Ejido Bonfil's new boat. For all the years of desert sheep hunting, they have used mules and horses, but they recently made the decision to buy a boat in order to access more sheep territory. Both La Reforma and Aguajito can be accessed by the waters of the Sea of Cortez. Jeff Murray's hunt was a couple of weeks before mine, and had been the first time the boat was used to conduct a hunt. Mine would be the second. I am sure future hunts will be about half by water and half by land. The Three Virgins Mountain is the largest area and has been super productive. It is huntable only by mule, horse and on foot. The other two mountains are easily huntable by this method, as well as by boat.

La Reforma is the area nearest to the Santa Rosalia launch site. Those mountains are much more rugged on the sea side than Aguajito. The idea was to check a couple of areas where the guys had seen sheep during Jeff Murray's hunt. Besides Israel the interpreter, my crew was made up of head guides **Luis Chavarria & Alfredo Barajas**. There were five other spotters and packers, who were all good hunters as well; they were **Gilberto Zambrano, Marcial Landeros, Manuel Zagala, Eduardo Canett & Miguel Arciga**.

The first area where we stopped to glass yielded a sighting of three rams. Two were quite good, and under normal circumstances we would have gone after them. However, the guides knew of a huge ram they spotted during Jeff's hunt just before mine. They said we should go check that area out to see if he were still there, and I agreed.

A little farther along, we beached the boat and began our vigil of glassing the area. After a couple of hours, we gave up as the sun had set and we needed to get to a campsite. The next morning we were up and off early. We went back to the big canyon, and within minutes two rams were spotted. Both were big, and one was the one that had been seen during Jeff's hunt. Naturally, the rams were at the very end of the canyon, near the top. The reason we had not seen them the previous day was that they had changed sides of the canyon from where they had been seen before. They were nicely tucked into a difficult-to-see niche of the canyon.

There was much talk of how to approach the rams. It was a very rugged area with boulders by the millions. We discussed going to the top, but the ridge up there was almost impossible to traverse. Finally we decided to follow the bottom of the canyon as far as possible. There were four or five side canyons and ridges between the sheep and us, and these ridges would probably block sight of us until we got to the last one.

As the crow would fly, the distance was just over a mile. As a

GRAND SLAM #152 19



L to R: Head guides Luis Chavarria and Alfredo Barajas, interpreter Israel Barraza and Dennis Campbell (#613, AL) with Dennis's March 7, 2010 desert ram from South Baja, Mexico's Ejido Alfredo V. Bonfil (Aguajito Mountain).

but the rest of the crew arrived soon after the shot. (By the way, I did not mention that it rained. Yes, rain in the desert. We got pretty soaked going up. It cleared before we got to the sheep, but it rained or misted for most of the stalk.)

When we finally got to him, we all realized the ram was something special. The horns had huge bases, and the lengths were pretty good too. Luis and Alfredo said he was near 180, and I did not disagree. After lots of photos, we started the long climb out (yes, it was even a climb to get back!). It took 3 1/2 hours to get back to the boat. What a wonderful day!

The next morning, the scoring was done and it turned out to be 179 3/8 SCI. It might not have made the magic mark of 180, but this is an amazing trophy and I am very happy!

We realize that this Skyline Feature has been a little longer than usual, but there is a reason for that. GSCO will have two or three tags to auction for this hunt during 2010-11. Be watching **GRAND SLAM** or our web site for those details later.