

I Am Shiwi

Wife of Oregon hunter Brett Nelson of Leupold & Stevens gets her first shot at hunting in New Zealand.

By Amanda Nelson

On an amazing hunting trip with Rodney Smith of Sunspots Safaris and my husband, Brett Nelson, to New Zealand, I shot four incredible animals each with just one shot! This trip changed my life.

My name is Amanda, but they called me "Shiwi" in New Zealand. Brett and I met Rodney Smith of Sunspots Safaris in March 2009 at the Portland Chapter SCI banquet. We both thought he was such a cool, friendly and knowledgeable guy and instantly liked him. In June, three months later, we took off with him to the South Island of New Zealand on a hunt.

I did not grow up in a "hunting family" when I was younger. My husband and I have been married nine years. I think part of the attraction I had to Brett was his love for hunting and the outdoors. I have always personally respected hunting and appreciated that Brett hunted. I love the meat and I love the mounts in our home. Another perk about hunting is that I really appreciate natural, free range and organic foods.

I had never hunted big game, but had been on some major hunts to places such as Africa with Brett. I just never saw myself getting involved in the sport. Rodney had encouraged me, and without even knowing it, made me believe in myself in this very masculine world. He said this would be an amazing trip for me, because, unlike Africa, there are no predators or insects out to harm us. My husband had been chased by a black mamba in South Africa, so this was appealing to me. Before the hunt, Rodney had us over to meet his beautiful wife, Hannah, and their adorable daughters. As we were socializing, he looked at me seriously and said, "Look around at all the New Zealand mounts on my walls; what would you like to shoot?"

I thought, "is he talking to me!?" He was very nonchalant but definite about our conversation. I told him, "I would like to shoot an Arapawa ram," as I pointed one out on his wall. That mount looked like nothing Brett had ever shot before, and it would look good hanging on our wall!

Away we went —over the Pacific. We got off the plane in Christchurch and met Brett's first guide, Don Cameron, who was so sweet and such an amazing guide. We got into two vehicles and drove straight to Lilydale wilderness area outside the town of Fairlie. We had a lovely meeting with the landowners, Donald and Barbara Bray. I was a little embarrassed when I met them, because I was still in my travel attire, which was shorts and high heels, because it was summer at home in the Northwest, but over in New Zealand their weather exactly opposite. It was the beginning of winter there and snow was deep. Rodney had local hunting clothes in his car that he had ordered for Brett and me so we would be comfortable. He said, "Amanda! Brett and I cannot be happy unless you are happy. We have to keep you warm." The clothes were wind proof, made no sound and the jacket was cut long enough to sit on. So at Donald and Barbara's house, we changed and off we went in Don's Toyota to hunt their property, which was huge endless mountains. I was in absolute awe!

Brett was looking for his tahr. It was a little late in the afternoon once we got to a point where we decided to get out and walk. We spotted tahr all over the peaks of the mountains. We literally were glassing straight up through our Leupold binoculars to see the tops of the high mountains. Rodney made the comment, "if you want to feel small, come to New Zealand." He was so right! Words cannot describe the

majestic beauty we were seeing. As we walked up a mountain road, we saw a few female tahr. Brett opted not to shoot. He was after something bigger. We called it a night after a while because it was getting dark.

The next day we were up and at it again. Don and Brett spotted tahr way up high in the mountains and decided to take off after them. Rodney and I stayed behind and got some video of their crazy mountain climb and watched them get smaller and smaller. After awhile Rodney and I decided to hike around and look for tahr for Brett to shoot and possibly find an Arapawa ram for me to shoot. We went in a different direction than Don and Brett. The weather was a challenge that day. We would have freezing fog, then clear sky, then freezing fog again all in a matter of moments. The fog was thick. Forget finding an animal in that!

We gained elevation and got above Brett and Don as we headed toward the bowl of Fox Peak Mountain. We were seeing tahr, big ones, because we were near the mountaintops. No sign of rams though. We desperately wanted Brett to come where we were but they were stuck in the freezing fog below us, climbing up and down, chasing after stubborn tahr, and would never reach us before it got dark. Brett had given his blessing that if we saw a big bull tahr, and I was able to make the shot, that he was okay with that. I was scared to death. That was not a part of the package deal that was in my head but "game on!" It still hadn't hit me that I was going to shoot a ram! Sure enough, Rodney and I were in perfectly clear skies and had a big bull tahr in our sights.

We climbed up a glacier as high as we could. We laid down on the snow about 285 yards from where the tahr were as Rodney helped me get the gun set up for a perfect



Amanda Nelson took this tahr on the South Island of New Zealand on a hunt with Sunspots Safaris.

shot. We had a .22-250 with us. It was a great gun for me! No recoil! I will never forget the moment. Rodney talked very calmly as I was getting ready to shoot my very first animal. I was listening to every word intently. He let me know that if I wasn't comfortable shooting, there would be other opportunities. We discussed where to shoot the tahr, which tahr I was after and then I practiced aiming at him. I was shaking and so nervous! I could feel my heart beating and I couldn't hear anything. The mountain was silent.

We probably lay there for over a half hour, which only felt like seconds to me. Rodney finally said, "if you are comfortable, now's the time to shoot." The tahr were looking to bound over the top of the mountain to the other side. I nodded that I was ready and I took the shot. Before I pulled the trigger, everything came together. My breathing came under control and I focused in on the reticle. I was surprisingly calm at that moment and didn't flinch when I made the shot! Due to lack of experience, I couldn't tell you how I felt about the shot other than I had the cross hairs right where I wanted them, and I felt that the tahr should

have gone down. The group spooked, and Rodney and I headed down the mountain to meet Brett and Don because it was getting to be dark and we didn't see any signs of the tahr being hit.

I was bummed that night but I knew we had one more day at Lilydale Wilderness. The next morning we headed back to where we had been hunting. Brett spotted three rams. I don't know how he did that. They camouflaged so well in the snowy rocks. They were resting about two thirds of the way up the mountain. All four of us hiked up closer to them. The mountain was steep and covered with snow and ice. I was trying to be a trooper and go with the flow, but my heart was pounding with fear and excitement. Rodney hiked behind me in case I fell, which was very kind of him. We got to a point where we had a shot at two rams at about 260 yards downhill from them and lay down in the snow. Brett told me to shoot the brown-faced ram, because it was in a good position for me. He was going to take the second shot at the multicolored ram. I challenged him a bit because I wanted to shoot the multicolored ram, but I let that go due to being the inexperienced one out

there.

Brett and I got set up side by side. Don worked with me and helped me get focused and told me how to take the best shot. Compared to the day before, I had less panic attack wait time. I had the ram in my sights and shot. Boom, down. Then Brett shot. Boom, down. The third ram was lucky because we were only after two, so he ran down the mountain and up the other side. It was really amazing to see him with all of his features and how quickly he maneuvered down the mountain below us. This hunt was a special husband and wife moment for me. Brett and I killed our first rams in New Zealand side by side! This was my first big game animal ever (or so I thought). I was so emotional I cried from excitement. We got several pictures (my ram was bigger). Brett still tells everyone he told me to shoot the bigger one because he is so generous and it was a better shot for me.

Poor Rodney packed out the animals, and I followed behind, trying not to slide and kill myself. It had been about an hour or two since we saw Brett and Don because they took off in search of tahr just after shooting our rams. As we approached the truck



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we saw them off in the distance. It looked as if Brett had something in his hands. Rodney radioed to them and confirmed it was a tahr! I was so excited! I didn't hear a gun shot though, but maybe they had been just too far away. In any case, I was excited and started running up the trail to check it out. They were located where Rodney and I had taken a shot at the tahr yesterday. As I got closer, Brett was on the radio with Rodney. Brett and Don were situated on a glacier. I decided to stay toward the bottom, due to being

fatigued and gave him the thumbs up and excited screams from where I was.

Little did I know that Brett radioed to Rodney that the tahr they had was mine from yesterday! Brett yelled down to me that it was my tahr. I screamed, and all of the sudden had enough energy to sprint up the mountain to them. I did shoot it and I did kill it the day before! So when I thought I shot a ram as my first animal I had actually shot a tahr!

Now I was on cloud nine! I couldn't have been more proud of myself at that moment! I was also thankful that Brett and Don found him, as they were in search of their own. They came upon him as they both were glassing in the area where Rodney and I were the night before. They were looking at the peaks of the mountain. Brett noticed a tahr that was positioned abnormally low on the mountain. Brett showed Don and he told Brett, "That's Amanda's tahr!" Brett told me later that he should have said nothing and shot in the air and claimed it as his



Brett Nelson of Leupold & Stevens and his wife Amanda took these two Arapawa rams.

own. We all got a good laugh out of that over dinner. Brett continued on after a tahr that day but they were climbing way too high and the snow conditions were so icy. No such luck for Brett and tahr that day.

It was time for us to hunt elsewhere the next day, so that evening we said good-bye to The Brays and thanked them for letting us hunt on their land. Brett told them we would be back, and jokingly made the comment that apparently he will be wearing high heels next time as I did when I met them, because that was the golden ticket for the tahr at Lilydale Wilderness.

We traveled to High Peak, where we met the generous Guild Family. Hamish Guild, another wonderful guide, entertained us for the next two days. Animals were everywhere we looked! Brett took an amazing red stag, which is a story all by itself, several fallow deer, and he finally got his tahr! I shot a matching spotted fallow deer (of course on purpose to color coordinate) with the .22-250 at 250 yards downhill.

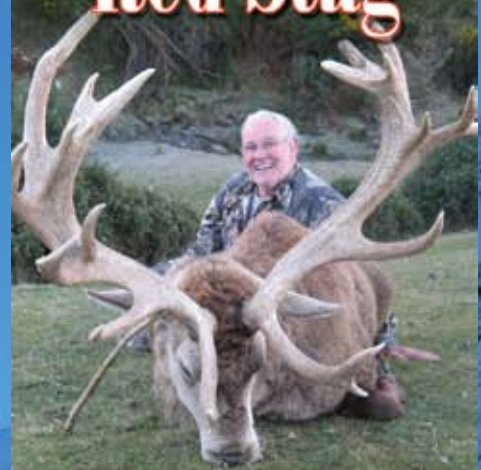
The next day I got a wild goat spotted in the distance from the road. He had taken off running up hill when I shot him at about 400 yards. That gun never let me down the whole trip! Hamish told me he ended up buying a .22-250 for his guests when they come to hunt on his land because he was so impressed with how I handled it.

We will be back to New Zealand! We absolutely loved every minute of it. A huge thank you goes out to Rodney for showing us the most incredible hunting. It was a trip that changed my life and made me believe that I can hunt too! That will be hard to top, but I am ready for the next adventure!

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