

CLOSE CALLS

with Horses

— LARRY'S SHORT STORIES #187 —

Hunting from horseback, in the mountains, is one of my all-time favorite ways to hunt, whether the quarry is elk, moose, sheep or goats. Mostly it's the pace of the horses and the unique access they provide to the wilderness. Adding horses to a hunting trip does add an element of risk, however; I've never had a serious accident, but there have been some close calls.

On an elk hunt in New Mexico (1993), I was riding at the back of the line, on a razorback ridge. The mule, just to my front, bumped a large stick and caused it to reorient itself in the middle of the trail, pointing directly at me, about girth high. Seeing a wreck in process, I immediately tried to stop or avoid the stick. Not possible, with this mule; the stick went under the girth and my mount

went rodeo. Off I went, intentionally; thinking that was the best choice for my future.

On a moose hunt, in the Wrangell Mountains of Alaska (2004), a grizzly bear came into camp and I shot him. They dragged his carcass away from the camp to use for bait. Two days later we were just back in camp from

a long day of moose hunting and stopped the horses to dismount. Apparently, the scent of the bear was still strong as my horse took off, just as my right foot hit the ground. How I got my cleated hunting boot out of that other stirrup, I will never know – but I did. That was close, and could have been a disaster.



This is similar, vintage wire from a farm in Missouri. Apparently, it is not worth recycling.

In the Northwest Territories (NWT) of Canada (2012) we were hunting Dall Sheep. The Canol Trail (from WWII) ran through this area and we were on it. The telegraph line, a mixture of steel and copper, was on the ground in places. My horse got his legs caught up in a downed portion and went crazy. A horse goes where his head goes and it took all of my strength and coaching to hold his head, until my guide could dismount, and carefully cut the wires. In this case, I was more concerned for the horse's safety than my own.

"Hunting from horseback... is not without its risks."

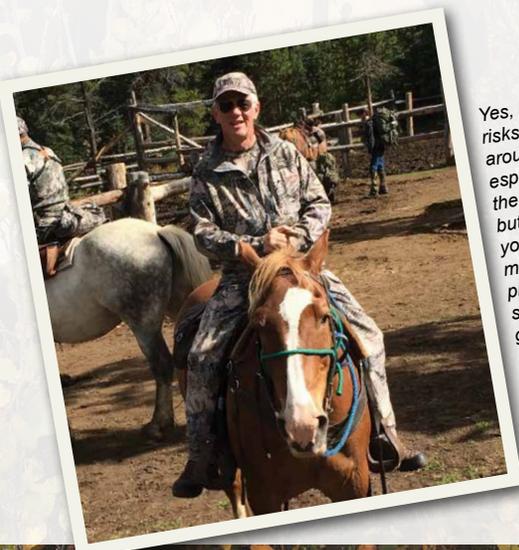
Hunting from horseback, in the mountains, is one of my favorite ways to hunt; but it is not without its risks. Always I pay extra attention when around horses, especially with the knowledge I've gained from these "close calls."



Larry Potterfield
Horseback Hunting in the
Mountains
New Mexico, Alaska, NWT Canada
1993, 2004, 2012



Stirrups are designed for slick-soled "cowboy" boots; so, I'm always on alert when riding with cleated-sole hunting boots. Typically I keep just the tip of my boot in the stirrup.



Yes, there are risks being around horses, especially in the mountains; but they take you to some magnificent places, in search of game.