



The author shot his Gamsbock on this 5700-ft. mountain in the Bavarian Alps.

Hunting The Alps Today

Photos by Author

The swirling fog covered the mountain top as I arrived at the picturesque hunting cabin in the Bavarian Alps. I was one of the lucky winners in the rare game species lottery for US Forces hunters stationed in Germany and had drawn a permit to hunt the Chamois or Gamsbock. Only 59 of these animals had been allocated to the US Forces quota in 1973.

This small goatlike animal weighs 60 to 70 pounds. It is a handsome creature. In the summer, its coat is yellowish brown and changes to dark brown during the winter months.

In the early part of the season it is very difficult to determine the sex of the chamois since both the buck and the female have horns. The horns of the buck are more curved at the end and slightly thicker. Later in the season, the bucks grow a narrow band of long hair (a *bert*) along the back. The *berts* vary between four to eight inches in length and are highly prized as trophies, and many hunters wear them in their hats.

Gamsbocks are divided into three categories: (1) I bucks nine years or older with excellent trophies; (2) IIA good bucks under nine years of age that are expected to advance into category I which are seldom shot; (3) IIB animals over three years old that are not expected to reach category I. (The IIB animals are the ones usually shot by hunters). The length of horns on bucks taken by hunters varies between six and nine inches in length. The horns are retained for life and the age can be determined by annual rings.

In West Germany, Gamsbock are found mainly in the Bavarian Alps. Their numbers and ranges are limited which necessitates controlled shooting by permit only.

In mid-August I received a call from Frau Hackert, Chief of the Wiesbaden Hunting Section, and was asked if I would like an early hunt for the Chamois. Another American hunter had booked the hunt, driven to Bavaria, taken one look at the mountain where the

hunt was to take place and decided to cancel his reservation. In addition to hunting for the Chamois, my permit also would allow me to shoot a IIB or IIIB red deer stag if the opportunity presented itself.

The hunt site was located near Tegernsee, a beautiful resort area nestled in the Bavarian Alps about 80 kilometers south of Munich. The large revier was situated on the side of a steep mountain that was covered with dense evergreen forest. Locating the Chamois in this area proved to be a very difficult but enjoyable experience.

I met my jaeger, Herr Hans Sigel—a hearty mountaineer in his late thirties—at the forestry cabin early in the morning. In Bavaria, hunters are guided by professional hunters and not government foresters as in other parts of Germany. These jaegers are employed by the Forestry Offices and are responsible for winter game feeding, shooting excess and undesirable animals and other game warden type duties.

After arriving at the cabin, I un-



Author and professional hunter, Sigel, begin climb for Gamsbock.
Author displays his Gamsbock taken on a mid-August hunt.



loaded my food and duffel and relaxed for a while, enjoying the magnificent scenery. Herr Sigel advised me that he needed to verify that my rifle was sighted in and test my marksmanship before I would be allowed to hunt. He set up a target about 100 yards behind the cabin and was satisfied when I placed the first two shots in the 3 inch bull.

Test firing the rifle before the hunt is a Bavarian law. My rifle is a Sako Finnbear, 270 caliber with a Pecar 4X scope. I use 150 grain loads sighted in at 200 yards. Bavarian law also states that game will not be shot at distances of over 200 meters, thus eliminating many possible wounding shots. Judging range across deep valleys and from peak to peak is very difficult for the inexperienced alpine hunter.

Before we began hunting, the guide gave me a bergstock (mountain stick) about five feet long to aid in ascending and descending the narrow game trails. The bergstock is very light and proved to be a valuable piece of equipment during the three-day hunt. It is also used as a rifle rest for shooting above the timberline.

Early in the afternoon, Herr Sigel announced it was time to start the long climb to the mountain meadow where the Chamois would be feeding. He told me there were only about 30 Chamois on his revier and finding a shootable buck would be difficult.

About 300 yards from the cabin, I saw my first, a young three-year-old with small horns. He had crossed the trail in front of us and stopped about 50 yards above on a ledge overlooking the trail.

The cry of alarm of the Gams is a shrill human-like whistle. They are very curious animals and if the hunters remain motionless, they will usually stand and stare at intruders for long periods.

After three hours of unsuccessful still hunting, we arrived at a small hunting cabin located on a bluff overlooking a small valley. Peering over the edge, the guide motioned for me to join him.

Directly below us and about 70 yards away stood three red deer stags—one 6-pointer in velvet and

two 10-pointers. Studying them through binoculars, we found the animals to be in the II and IIIA category—prime stags too young to shoot. I was disappointed because seeing a stag in the daylight hours prior to the rut is a rare occasion. As we were descending the trail to the cabin, we saw two more red stags, but it was too dark to identify them.

On the second morning we arose at 4:00 a.m., had a cup of tea and started the climb in the darkness. Almost immediately we saw the

was a 6-pointer and bolted when we approached to within 30 yards of him. This animal was also too young to shoot.

When we were nearing the top of a pine-covered ridge, I saw movement above and a small chamois stepped out into full view from behind a large boulder. I tapped the guide on the shoulder, and we stopped. A small herd of seven chamois were feeding in a clearing about 100 meters above us. We watched the animals for 20 minutes but found the herd consisted of only

through the brush as we were descending the steep, rocky trail on our return to the cabin.

Upon arrival at the cabin, we had a quick meal and hit the sack. Herr Sigel said we would rise at 3:00 a.m. the following morning and climb two hours in the darkness to reach a large alpine meadow before dawn. He wanted to give me a chance to bag one of the elusive red deer stags.

It seemed I had slept only a few moments when I heard the alarm clock ring. After a quick breakfast,



A German forester presents the author with a branch dipped in blood. German hunting is surrounded by such traditional ceremonies.

shadowy forms of four red deer hinds feeding in a small glade that bordered the trail. Shortly thereafter we heard the doglike bark of an alarmed Roe deer and with our binoculars, located a herd of the small deer in a ravine below us. We were very lucky because the animals did not again voice their alarm which would have alerted every animal within a $\frac{3}{4}$ -mile radius.

We continued our climb and were surprised by the sight of a young stag that was unconcernedly walking along the trail toward us. It

females and kids. We quietly continued and flushed a family of four Auerhan from a tall pine tree; these rare turkey-sized game birds are now fully protected in Germany.

When we approached the cabin where we had seen the red stags the previous evening, the guide motioned toward a good IIIA Gamsbock that was grazing along the side of a small knoll. It carried a beautiful set of horns but was only six years old, so we could only watch the animal casually walk into the forest. We heard several red deer crashing

we started climbing the wet, rocky trail which was hazardous even during the day. When we finally reached the meadow, we were soaked with perspiration.

The meadow was a beautiful sight—bathed in brilliant moonlight and surrounded by the black outlines of the stately evergreen forest. There were no red stags to be seen; however, after a 30-minute wait, a young spike stag appeared 100 yards from where we were sitting. A few minutes later, three more stags emerged from the for-



This German forester is blowing on his ceremonial hunting horn after a successful hunt.

est. All were shootable animals in the II and IIIB category. They were about 600 yards further up the nearly vertical slope of the meadow. We waited until the stags were behind the pines before we started the stalk.

We thought the young stag would run into the forest when we started moving, but instead, he ran straight up the slope to the other animals and alerted them to our presence. Just as we arrived at the stand of pines and settled into position, the stags disappeared into the forest

within easy rifle range. Disappointed, we continued our search for the Gamsbock.

Since this was the last day of my hunt, the guide said we would climb to the top of the mountains hoping the bucks were at the higher elevations. After an arduous climb, we finally reached the summit; on one side there was a sheer drop of over a 1000 feet to a bowl-shaped basin. We were surrounded by lofty snow-capped alpine peaks and far to the South, we could see the Austrian border.

In the crystal-clear air, we looked down upon small villages with wood smoke curling up from the chimneys. Herr Sigel commented that this area was a paradise for wild animals. I was convinced, because I had seen more red deer in the past two days than in my previous three years of hunting in Germany.

Walking along the ridge, the guide stopped and pointed toward the shapes of two red stags that quickly disappeared into the pine thickets below. A few minutes later, we saw a IA Gamsbock standing on a rocky pinnacle about 150 yards away. Unfortunately, he was in another revier, and again I could not shoot.

Descending the game trail, we started working our way back to the small hunting cabin. Herr Sigel, on my right, stopped and looked through his binoculars for a few moments. Excitedly he turned to me and said, "Gams—one is a IIB buck."

I could not see the animals as they were behind some pine trees. Suddenly I heard the crashing of an animal and then observed him running across a clearing about 90 yards from us. The guide told me to shoot quickly, and I snapped off a shot as the crosshairs settled on his shoulder. The Gamsbock dropped immediately and didn't move. Two more Chamois ran across the clearing and bounded into the forest.

We walked down to the Gamsbock, and I was very pleased—the guide said it was a good IIB buck. The animal was five-years-old and the horns were slightly under eight inches long. We found the 150-grain bullet had gone through the lungs. Herr Sigel placed the last bite (a pine branch) in the mouth of the fallen animal and presented me with the shooter's branch, which I placed in the band of my hat.

We field-dressed the Gams and placed it in the guide's rucksack. It was a two-hour walk back to the cabin, and we took turns carrying the buck. Hunting the Alps was a pleasure. The hills were beautiful; we had done a lot of walking; we had seen many large and small game animals. Hunting the Alps can be exciting and rewarding. ■