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# John Monson's Quest for Ullmann Award

## Part 2

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**F**rom Macedonia, I flew on to Switzerland for my Alpine ibex hunt. I was met at the Zurich Airport by Mathais Ambord, my English-speaking Swiss guide who was working for Sergio. At the hotel in St. Maurice on the Rhone River we met Philippe Dubois, the local Garde de la Chasse, who would accompany us into the mountains.

I met Mathais the next morning. Philippe was on time, and we loaded our gear into his new Toyota Land Cruiser, drove down the Rhone River valley to the small town of Vouvry, crossed the river and began our ascent into the mountains.

We continued our drive up and through the small hamlet of Tanay until the road finally ended at a high, stone Alpine hunting hut adorned with a Swiss flag. The day was clear, the ground was sopping wet and the grass and rocks over which we now

ascended were very slippery.

We came to a saddle of two ridges. We dropped over this lip into a big bowl that was at the top of a valley. In the far distance, I could see the blue waters of Lake Geneva. Far below us was a small lake and on its shores a long stone cowshed and adjoining farm buildings.

Philippe stopped within 50 yards to glass some ibexes he spotted on the slopes far below us. He set up his Swarovski spotting scope and after he pinpointed a couple of males, I could also see them in my Leica binocular. He kept seeing more animals and now as the light continued to improve, we counted 14 males and quite a large number of females and young. He told me that a male would need to be at least eight years old for us to be able to consider shooting him.

After another half hour studying the ibexes, Philippe turned to me and

suggested that we should return to Saint Maurice and pick up what we would need to spend the night at one of the hunting huts in a different valley. So Philippe led the way back.

As we re-crossed the saddle, however, he stopped briefly and said that as long as we were here we might as well check out the top of the bowl and the ridges and valleys that fell off on the other side of it.

So up we trudged. It was still a long way to the top. Philippe stopped and glassed all around the peaks and the ridges that connected to a succession of other valleys. As we glassed, he saw a set of ibex horns jutting out above a rocky ledge.

Philippe studied the horns for a couple of minutes and then said we needed to get a better look. We walked until we reached the crest of the ridge, and he glassed again. After a short period the ibex got up and turned

around to lie down again. Both Philippe and Mathais said it was a good trophy with widespread horns and good bases.

Philippe asked whether I was interested. He judged it to be 75-76 cm long and seven to nine years old. I thought about it and decided to try to bag this ibex.

"OK," Philippe said. "Let's have a break, get something to eat and then stalk him." We had an early lunch with one foot in Switzerland and one in France. The ibex was in Switzerland.

After we finished, we devised a stalking tactic. Mathais would go back down the path we had ascended in the hope that the ibex would focus on him. Philippe and I would climb up toward the ibex under the crest of the hill until we were within about 40-50 meters.

Philippe wanted to get as close as possible. If I were to put a killing shot in the ibex and he jumped or rolled backwards he would plunge 500 meters down the sheer face behind him. If he jumped or rolled forward he would probably roll down the steep grassy slope.

We hoped to get close enough that when he spotted us he would get up and take a couple of steps forward. This would lessen the chance he would roll backward off the cliff. So we stalked cautiously uphill.

We came into the open about 40 meters downhill. The ibex jumped up, took a few steps forward and turned to go around the side of the rock outcropping behind him and into the jumbled rocks there. I shot quickly off-hand, my first shot hitting him in the shoulder, the second farther back. But he continued forward.

"Shoot again!" Philippe yelled. But now all I had was a Texas bull's-eye. The ibex absorbed this last shot, took a couple more steps and disappeared. I looked like he fell down in the rocks. I walked up and into the rocks and saw him where he fell after my third shot. Mathais joined us, and we shook hands all around and took pictures.

On our way down, we stopped at the hunting hut. A Swiss huntress we had met on our drive up the valley in the morning had bagged her female ibex and she and her friends had just sat down to a three-course hunters' luncheon. They invited us to join them.

So we feasted on appetizers, lamb, beef, cheeses, bread and a cake she had baked. We washed it all down with four different kinds of local Swiss

Rhône wines, followed by schnapps and coffee. Our luncheon was accompanied by the ubiquitous ringing of Swiss cowbells. Even though I couldn't see a single cow, the hills were alive with the sound of music.

The next day dawned gray and windy. By noon it was sprinkling and by 1:30 raining. I had made the right choice to stalk and take that ibex. I thought as we drove in the now-heavy rain to the Zurich Airport.

After a short night at the hotel at the airport, I arrived in Slovenia where I was met by Dragan Matošić, my Croatian hunting guide who has worked with Sergio for many years. Dragan speaks very good English and we had a good discussion about Slovenian alpine hunting on our hour-long drive to a quaint and comfortable small hotel in the Slovenian Alps.

My local Slovenian guide, Tisler Janez, arrived for the evening hunt, dressed in the traditional alpine hunting clothing worn by most of the Austrian and Swiss hunting guides. We departed in his Land Rover and drove up into the Alps.

The weather was gray and humid but the afternoon rain and hail had abated and we hiked into an area where, in about 15 minutes Tisler spotted a chamois from a spot on a narrow trail. The chamois was below us and about a quarter of a mile away.

Satisfied that the chamois was a shootable one, Tisler told Dragan we would stalk to a different spot within a reasonable shooting distance. We maneuvered for about 15 to 20 minutes to a new spot from where we peered down to try and again locate him. We searched in vain. Now in the rapidly fading evening light, Tisler said we would have to retreat and try again in the morning.

So back to our hotel we went. Dragan and I had a late supper. In the

morning Tisler was accompanied by an assistant, a young man named Zan Blejč. In early dim gray light we hiked to the same area where we had spotted the chamois. We hoped to see him again, but he was nowhere to be found.

After a few more minutes of searching, Tisler turned around and we returned to the spot where we left Dragan. He had not seen any chamois so we left for a different area.

A steep mountain wall at our feet curved around to our right and then ran out of sight straight away. Tisler watched the ridges in front of us and spotted a chamois — a male he said. Dragan also saw it, but I could not spot it. Tisler said we had to get closer to him so we set off downward on a very narrow and steep trail.

Down and down we went. The trail down ended at the base of the high cliff and a series of grassy ridges fell off from the cliff base. Tisler clambered up the slope above our trail and again looked. He spotted the chamois on a ridge in front of us feeding in the rocks and moving in and out of the brush. I finally was able to find him in my binocular, and its range finder indicated he was 380 yards away.

As I peered through the six-power scope on Tisler's 6.8 x 74 Mauser I could not find the chamois in it. He had disappeared behind some brush. Finally Zan lay down beside me and put the scope on the chamois, which had moved back into view, so I was able to find it.

It was a long shot, and after some more whispered discussions, we agreed I should place the tip of the reticle just above the chamois's spine. Dragan told me the chamois was now 361 meters away, so I worked to get the correct sight picture and slowly squeezed off a shot. I did not have a good grip on the rifle and the scope

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punched back in my eye, momentarily dislocating my contact lens. I couldn't see anything but Dragan said I had hit him as his rear legs sagged.

Dragan said shoot again but as I couldn't see, I told Žan to shoot. He fired two more shots. The chamois still didn't move, so I fired a fourth. Still no movement. But Tišler said to Dragan he was obviously hit.

We started off on a new ridge, which paralleled the ridge where the chamois was. We had not gone 50 yards when Dragan told me the slope was too steep, grassy and wet and thus much too dangerous for him and for me to continue on to try and recover the chamois. Tišler and Žan, however, continued on and 20 minutes later we heard a shot and after another 20-30 minutes they returned with the chamois.

It was a very good chamois.

As Tišler and Žan had approached the chamois its head was down, but he fired a last shot to make sure. He said they found four bullet holes in the chamois plus the last, fifth, shot. My first shot had broken its spine above its stomach, which was why it could not move. I was one animal away from the 32 necessary to achieve the Fourth Echelon. I had two more hunts scheduled in 2008 and felt confident I could connect on one of them.

But European hunts are not so simple as I again discovered in October. Two weeks of hunting European brown bear near Vologda, more than 1,000 miles northeast of Moscow and then near Kirov, 1,200 miles east of Moscow, produced only one bear sighting and one shot, in very dim light, which I missed. In the fall of 2007, I also hunted boar near Pskov 1,000 miles northwest of Moscow without ever seeing a bear. The Russian bears were eluding me. It was thus to be a European tahr in December or nothing more in 2008.

So on December 2, I flew to Vienna where Klemens Bugeinig of Hunting in Austria, Miesenbach, picked me up at the Vienna Airport on a cold, gray December morning and drove me in rain to the Sports Hotel, Schneeberghof in Puchberg, Austria, near the Miesenbach hunting area.

At the hotel, I changed into hunting clothes and taking Klemens' advice I put my .375 H&H barrel on my Blaser R-93. Klemens had told me that he considered the tahr extremely tough

and that the .375 would, in his opinion, be better than the 7mm barrel that I had also brought.

At 2 p.m. Bert Holdeder, my guide and PH, picked me up at the hotel and we drove to the hunting area. We got up in a high seat which looked down and across a steeply sloped field. We stayed in the high seat until dark, but no tahr appeared before dark.

The next morning we drove to a different high seat. This seat overlooked a larger field than the one of the prior evening. Because the field sloped so steeply down out of sight, its far edge was not visible. After about an hour, Bert said he had heard a branch snap over the crest of the field. We waited a few more minutes and still seeing nothing Bert said he thought we should investigate.

With my rifle at the ready we slowly walked along the western edge of the field. As the lower slope came into our view, we saw an animal across from us at the eastern edge of the field. The light was not good enough for me to immediately identify it.

"It's a tahr!" Bert said. "Shoot!"

The animal was walking away from us about 75 yards away. I found it in my Swarovski scope and put my crosshairs on its back, as it was below us, and shot. It stopped at my shot, but didn't fall down. I shot again and this time it went down. He was an excellent old bull tahr. When he was scored a couple of months later he qualified as the new number two European tahr in the SCI Record Book for European animals.

I was elated. It had been a good hunt and we lucked out with the weather. I had my 32nd European animal. Upon our return to the Schneeberghof, I called Norbert Ullmann who congratulated me and told me I was the first American to complete the Fourth Echelon of the Ullmann Award.

My quest was over. During the course of 2008, I hunted in six European countries and spent more than six weeks hunting in the mountains of five of those countries. It's not easy to hunt the 32 European animals necessary to achieve this award. I started hunting in Europe 16½ years ago, and my quest took me to 11 countries. The award was designed to encourage hunting in Europe and, in my opinion, it has accomplished its goal. I enjoyed all of my European hunts, the places I saw, the different people I met and the accommodations I had. The whole experience was exciting! I wish I could do it all over again. 🐾