

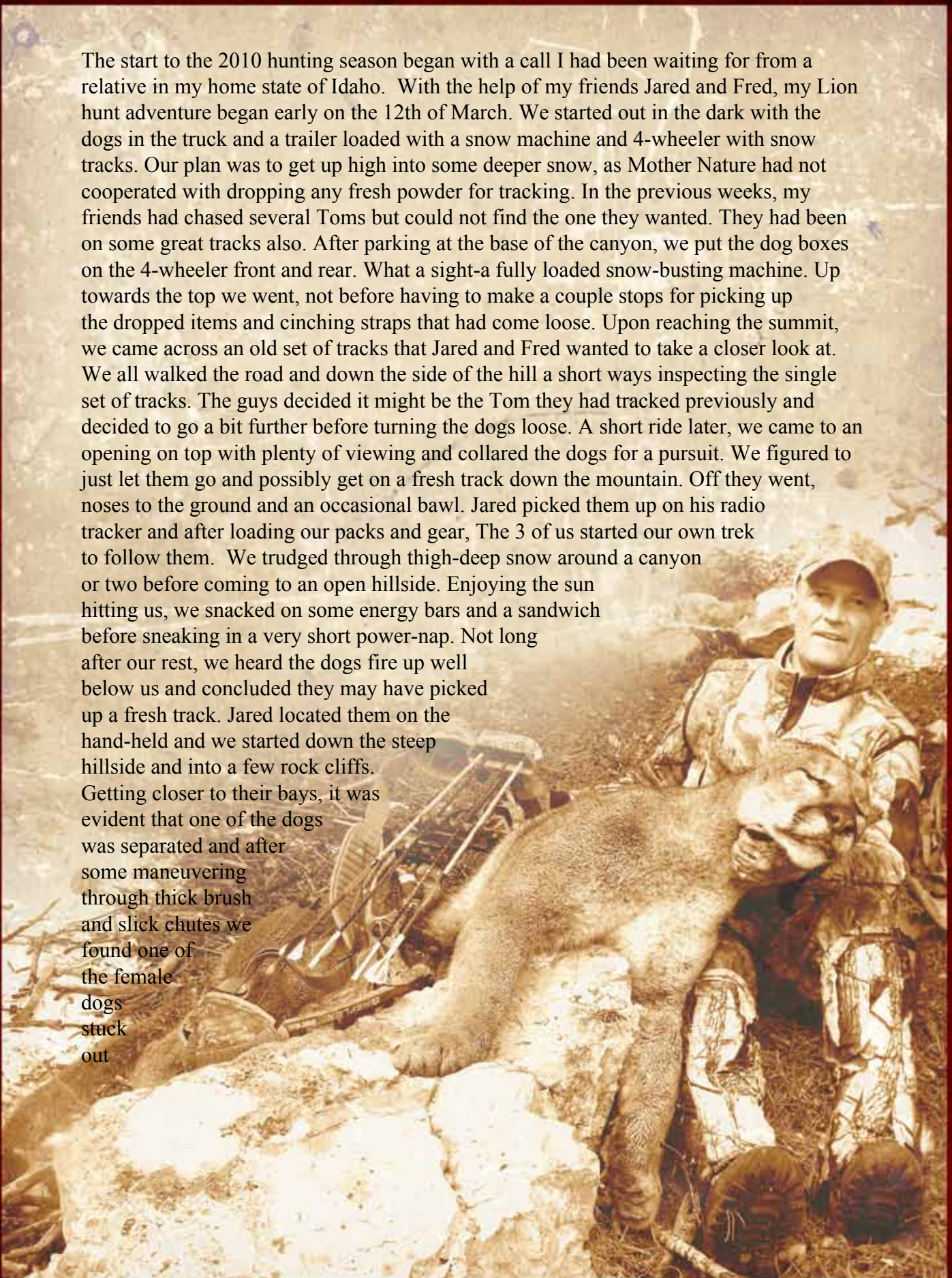
June Journals

Darin Farnham

Big Spring Cat



The start to the 2010 hunting season began with a call I had been waiting for from a relative in my home state of Idaho. With the help of my friends Jared and Fred, my Lion hunt adventure began early on the 12th of March. We started out in the dark with the dogs in the truck and a trailer loaded with a snow machine and 4-wheeler with snow tracks. Our plan was to get up high into some deeper snow, as Mother Nature had not cooperated with dropping any fresh powder for tracking. In the previous weeks, my friends had chased several Toms but could not find the one they wanted. They had been on some great tracks also. After parking at the base of the canyon, we put the dog boxes on the 4-wheeler front and rear. What a sight-a fully loaded snow-busting machine. Up towards the top we went, not before having to make a couple stops for picking up the dropped items and cinching straps that had come loose. Upon reaching the summit, we came across an old set of tracks that Jared and Fred wanted to take a closer look at. We all walked the road and down the side of the hill a short ways inspecting the single set of tracks. The guys decided it might be the Tom they had tracked previously and decided to go a bit further before turning the dogs loose. A short ride later, we came to an opening on top with plenty of viewing and collared the dogs for a pursuit. We figured to just let them go and possibly get on a fresh track down the mountain. Off they went, noses to the ground and an occasional bawl. Jared picked them up on his radio tracker and after loading our packs and gear, The 3 of us started our own trek to follow them. We trudged through thigh-deep snow around a canyon or two before coming to an open hillside. Enjoying the sun hitting us, we snacked on some energy bars and a sandwich before sneaking in a very short power-nap. Not long after our rest, we heard the dogs fire up well below us and concluded they may have picked up a fresh track. Jared located them on the hand-held and we started down the steep hillside and into a few rock cliffs. Getting closer to their bays, it was evident that one of the dogs was separated and after some maneuvering through thick brush and slick chutes we found one of the female dogs stuck out



on a rock ledge. She got turned around during the chase apparently and was now out on a sheer ledge howling like crazy. Jared made his way to her, helping guide her back to the trail and off to the other hounds she went. Not long after, we heard Fred shout that they had one in a tree-wow! All of the hounds were going crazy at the base of a tall pine in a snow-covered draw. After making my way to the "tree-party" and 6 ½ hours from leaving the machines, it was quite a sight to see the beautiful Tom about 40 feet up in the branches. He was a majestic dark tan with a couple of war scars on his forehead. We all dropped our packs and gear and started videoing, taking some pictures and sizing him up. Fred was on the phone with his Dad also, trying to decide on the size of the cat, and judging him with the others they had chased previously. After 30 minutes or so-it seemed much longer-we decided I would get to take the shot. I had drawn the "long straw". The guys set up the video cameras again after tying the hounds up, away from the tree. All the dogs were definitely not happy about that as they figured it was their prize also. We positioned for a clean, ethical shot on this magnificent creature and the cameras started rolling. I waited for the go-ahead from Fred and dialed in my pin on a nice crease behind the shoulder. I let loose a perfect arrow as the Carbon Express Maxima Hunter made a swift pass-through and lodged in the tree. The Tom spun around and started crashing down through the branches. As we witnessed the falling cat, we hoped he would not get lodged in the big pine. But it was not to be as he finally hit the ground already expired. What a rush, as we made our way to the fallen prize. It was a few high-fives along with more video and camera shots to follow. A call from the cell phone to Fred's father and we coordinated a pick-up at the bottom of the canyon in a few hours. What a way to start the 2010 hunting season! I owe it to Jared and Fred for all their help. They are a couple of human "mountain goats", absolute animals when out hunting. A huge "Thank You" also goes out to my lovely wife and daughters for putting up with my obsession.

Darin Farnham



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