

## Correcting the Type Locality of *Ovis canadensis canadensis* Shaw

WILLIAM D. WISHART (retired)<sup>1</sup>, Alberta Fish and Wildlife, 7<sup>th</sup> Floor, O.S. Longman Building, 6909-116<sup>th</sup> Street, Edmonton, AB T6H 4P2, Canada

**Abstract:** The type locality of the Rocky Mountain bighorn (*Ovis canadensis canadensis*) has been variously recorded as near Calgary; near Banff; and more recently as on the Bow River in the mountains near Exshaw AB. These locales are a result of a coordinate error made in 1802 by the collector, a fur trader named Duncan McGillivray. His coordinates placed the collection site in southeastern British Columbia even though he was on the Bow River in Alberta. His fur trader/surveyor companion at the time of the collection was David Thompson who made a detailed description of the collection site in his journals which were published several years later. The actual type locality carefully described by Thompson is on the shale banks of the Bow River seven miles downstream from Exshaw and five miles from the foot of the nearest mountain.

**Key words:** Bow river, David Thompson, Duncan McGillivray, *Ovis canadensis canadensis*, Seebe, type locality

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<sup>1</sup> Email: bpwishart@yahoo.ca

The type locality of *Ovis canadensis canadensis* is generally indicated as the mountains on the Bow River near Exshaw Alberta (Wilson and Reeder 1993). The Bow River location is correct; the mountains near Exshaw are incorrect. The error developed as a result of an inaccurate date and location provided by Duncan McGillivray in a memorandum written 2 years after he had collected the type bighorn ram (McGillivray 1802). In his memorandum McGillivray writes that on November 30, 1800 he shot the ram at “longitude 115.30 West, and latitude 50. North”. These coordinates placed the type locality in southeastern British Columbia. While the latitude is clearly wrong, his longitude where it intercepts the Bow River is in Banff National Park approximately 45 km west of Exshaw is also incorrect. McGillivray’s recollections were obviously approximations of when and where he killed his bighorn ram. The latitude error was noted by Allen (1912) and in a footnote he attempted to show where the Bow River

emerged from the first range of mountains as 51 20’ N which is where the Ghost River emerges from the mountains about 21 km north of Exshaw.

At the time of McGillivray’s collection he was accompanied by David Thompson, a fur trader, surveyor and map maker for the North West Company of Montreal. Thompson’s narrative of their travels along the Bow River was edited over 100 years later by J. B. Tyrrell (1916). Tyrrell states that Thompson and McGillivray followed the north bank of the Bow River, (without any reference to the collection of mountain sheep), “to the steep cliffs of the mountains where the town of Exshaw is now situated”. Tyrrell’s quote has a footnote by E. A. Preble from the Biological Survey, Washington D.C. that states, “Near this point, McGillivray killed and preserved a mountain sheep...the locality from which the type came”. This incorrect conclusion of the type locality of *Ovis canadensis canadensis* has prevailed to this day. The mountains near Exshaw were

actually the approximate location of the survey party on 30 November which was the date that McGillivray had incorrectly recalled when he had collected his ram.

In a more recent and more thorough edition of Thompson's narrative by Barbara Belyea (1998) the date of McGillivray's collection was on 29 November 1800. On that date Thompson clearly describes the steep shale banks along the Bow River where McGillivray killed his bighorn. He refers to a 3 mile stretch of the Bow River as having many strong rapids with several falls: "the most considerable of these falls were 3 which all lay in the same bend of the river" namely what is now known as Kananaskis Falls. This stretch of river included the Moberly Rapids and Horseshoe Falls west to Kananaskis Falls at Seebe Alberta which is approximately 5 km east of the front range of the Rocky Mountains, (both sets of falls were dammed and redirected for electric power in the early 1900s). On the same day that McGillivray killed the ram the survey party "put up at 4 PM, having amused ourselves the whole after noon with running after the Goats {sheep}" (Belyea 1998). The pursuit of the sheep would have taken place on horseback on the meadows above the shale river breaks below Horseshoe Falls (Dam). The meadows and shale banks comprised of the Blackstone formation below Horseshoe Dam still persist, however, bighorns no longer occur on this site. The coordinates for the portion of the Bow River that represents the river breaks and the type locality of where McGillivray collected *Ovis canadensis canadensis* are 51° 07' 14" N, 115° 01' 45" W. Ironically, this historic site which is the type locality of our provincial

mammal, the Rocky Mountain Bighorn, is now threatened by the approval of the M.D. of Bighorn in September 2007 for a housing development for 5000 people.

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