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TIPPING

by Dennis Campbell

As was promised a couple of issues ago, I am going to attempt to shed a little light on hunter tipping. I ran out of time while putting the Spring 2002 issue together, and had to beg off and/or postpone.

There have always been many questions in hunters' minds when it comes to tipping. No easy, right, or wrong answer to this question exists. It will always remain complicated because of the many variables. I will try to touch on a few of these, and add my own thoughts along the way as well. I must put a disclaimer here that all of the following IS ONLY MY OPINION. You obviously must make up your own mind.

TIP 10%. End of article. Well, maybe that is a little too simplistic. Okay.. tip 10% on hunts costing up to \$15,000 and gradually decrease all the way down to 5% by the time you get to \$50,000 or above. End of article. Okay, maybe I should go a little deeper than that. However, if you do not want to clutter your mind with trivial things, then use the "10% up to \$15,000 and decrease to 5% gradually until a hunt gets to \$50,000 or more," and you will be in line and never considered cheap or tight-fisted.

For those wanting more, we will now go with other examples, remembering that all you read here is OPINION (my own). I will use only sheep and goat hunts as examples, but obviously one could use these guidelines for other types of hunts, including African safaris. The safaris can get quite complicated because of varying daily rates and trophy fees for different countries, and safari operators for that matter. I am no expert on Africa, and this publication is not the place to get into that. Otherwise, hunts in almost any other part of the world can be extrapolated from my examples.

Some Rocky Mtn. goat or Mongolian ibex hunts run in the \$4,000 range. A good standard \$400 would apply here pretty well. Divide the tip up appropriately. On the goat hunt, you might have only a guide and wrangler, or guide and cook. In such a case, you might divide it up as 75%, or \$300, for the guide, and 25%, or \$100, for the wrangler or cook. On a Mongolian ibex hunt, it might be an interpreter/guide, local guide, and driver. Here it could go as 50% or \$200 to the interpreter/guide, 25% (\$100) local guide, and 25% (\$100) driver. Maybe you get the picture here and begin to realize how this thing can get complicated.

You drew a Western state bighorn tag or desert permit, and the outfitter charges you \$6,000. Here it could be as simple as you and the guide/outfitter, and in such a scenario he/she would get the whole \$600. However, it is not uncommon to have two or three guides and a cook on an Arizona or Nevada desert hunt. It is anyone's guess under this type of situation, but the head person would normally get at least 50%. One other consideration with this example is that many times these tags are once-in-a-lifetime, and maybe the 10% should be bumped up a little (more variables!).

Dall sheep hunts average around \$10,000. There is usually a guide and wrangler (or cook), but it is not uncommon to have just a guide. Depending on how much the wrangler (cook) does, they might deserve as much as 25% of the tip (\$250). However, that could be adjusted downward or upward, depending on the service or work performed. If it is just you and the guide, I do not feel that a \$1000 tip is too high. I would add that this could be adjusted downward if the guide is less than enthusiastic or has little ability. A guide who wanted me to shoot the first legal, mediocre ram would not get \$1000 from me. Furthermore, if I passed up a smallish ram and the guide pouted for a couple of days, I would not be too generous either. A good guide keeps a positive attitude and leads not only in the actual guiding, but in the emotional part too (keeping your spirits up).

What about a \$7000 Chinese blue sheep expedition or an \$11,000 Siberian snow sheep hunt? Asian hunts

should follow the same 10% rule, but you should expect more variables. For example, on a blue sheep hunt in China you can experience having a multitude of helpers. Besides the head guide, there will be another person known as the subguide or horseman. You will for sure have a driver and hunt arranger (interpreter). There will be a camp manager and at least two cooks. There will probably be a couple of food servers, a couple of ladies who clean the tents (yurts), and even a lady (or man) who stokes the fire at night. Wow, what do you do with so many?! I just add up all the folks (sometimes you have to ask who the helpers are) and start dividing from there. Under the above scenario, I would start with the knowns. I would always give the guide at least \$200, subguide \$100, interpreter/hunt arranger \$100, and driver \$100. If you start with the intention of giving \$700, then \$500 of it is gone already. From there, there might be seven or eight more people to tip, and \$200 would not go far. You could break it down to \$25 or \$30 each, or better still, up the amount of your total tip. These people are desperately poor, and what better time to become a humanitarian?

Before getting to the snow sheep example, let me stay with the humanitarian idea here for a moment. Last year I hunted a tur in the Caucasus Mts. of Russia. One of my three guides (the head guide) was quite talkative. He had to use the interpreter, of course, but one of the first questions he asked was how much money I made per month. I did not want to answer that question, and asked the interpreter what I should say. He told me to say some very low amount, which I did. He immediately announced that he made \$30 per month (when translated into U.S. dollars). I liked the guy, and he was a very good guide besides. He really tried, and had a very positive attitude. I learned he had a wife and two small children, and I made up my mind to give him a good tip. When I gave him \$500, he became tearful, as this was more than a whole year's pay in his job as a gamekeeper or game warden. With all the other help, I ended up giving a 20% tip on that hunt. All those particular people really needed the money. Am I just an old softie? We cannot help everyone, can we? Of course not.. but it made a difference to that man, I can assure you.

A Siberian snow sheep hunt usually ends up being just a guide, cook, and interpreter. If we use an \$11,000 hunt as an example, then \$1,100 would be a good tip, with maybe 60% going to the guide, 30% to the interpreter, and 10% to the cook. No big problems here.

Let's go now to some of the more expensive hunts. A \$15,000 Rocky Mtn. bighorn or Stone sheep hunt would fall into my suggested \$1,500 (10%) range. However, many of those hunts are now up to \$18,000. Would this be the place to start backing off the 10% rule of thumb? Maybe and probably. In reality, does a guide really do any more on one of the hunts of higher value than the ones of lesser value? In the case of a Stone or bighorn hunt that costs \$18,000 or even \$20,000, one could argue that \$1,500 is enough of a tip.

What about a \$20,000 to \$28,000 Marco Polo, Gobi argali, or China argali hunt? Maybe \$1,500 to \$1,800 in tips could be justified. An Altay argali or Mexico desert sheep hunt gets all the way up there to over \$40,000, and sometimes near \$50,000. In those cases, 5% or less is probably in order.

It seems that suddenly my suggested 10% rule fell apart. Am I saying that a maximum figure gets to sound better? Maybe I am! The law of diminishing returns seems to come into play. I have a hard time justifying a double or triple tip for a Mexico desert sheep hunt or a Marco Polo hunt over a Dall sheep hunt. Maybe, just maybe, I am saying that we could cap the tip suggestion at \$2,000 to \$2,500 and be totally justified. It is just that the 10% rule, almost up to that amount, should be adhered to rather closely, and at times even raised for special circumstances.

Outfitter Tipping?

Good question! A general rule of thumb is to not tip the outfitter. However, if the outfitter is also the guide, then I see no good reason not to do so. Also, if the outfitter goes above and beyond in a particular aspect of the hunt, a tip would then also be in order.

Things or Money?

Money ALWAYS works! Only give things if you KNOW the person needs or appreciates them. A few examples which come to mind from my personal experience include once when I gave my guide a range finder. I first asked him whether he would prefer money or the range finder, and he chose the range finder. In another case, I gave a coat (King of the Mountain wool... very expensive). Again, I asked first. On another occasion I gave binoculars, but asked first. What I am saying is do not assume that things are better... ASK!

Do Not Be a Cheapskate!

First of all, if you need to justify your actions to someone else or to yourself, you may be wrong. Over the years I have heard a lot of people make statements about why they gave a particular tip. Sometimes they were right, but MOST of the time it was an excuse for being stingy. I do not want to offend here, but following are some of the justification statements I have heard. Remember that MOST of the time these are EXCUSES for being cheap. You decide, but I will add comments to some of these statements:

“I only hunted two days.” (Would you have preferred to hunt for 10?)

“I only tip according to the number of days I actually hunt.” (Hmm, do you want guides to walk you around and around the mountain?)

“U.S. money is worth more in a developing country.”

“The hunt was too expensive already.” (Why didn't you book with someone else then? Do you think the outfitter will give the guide and cook a tip for you?)

“I did not get a big one, so they don't deserve a tip.” (Can you climb? Can you shoot? Did you miss a big one?)

“The outfitter did not treat me right.” (What about the guide?)

“The hunt was a disaster.” (Was it the guide's fault, or were you to blame? Be honest with yourself!)

“I did not get anything on the hunt, so do not owe a tip.” (Was that the guide's fault or yours?)

“They knew what they were getting paid when they signed on.” (Oh, really? I'll bet their decision was not made because of people like you!)

Exception to the Rule!

If a person has had to save a long time, or even borrow money, to go, that is a legitimate reason to tip less. Explain your financial situation to the guide, and he/she WILL understand.

People Talk!

I have heard of several very wealthy hunters who tip little or nothing. To me, this is a classic case of greed and selfishness. Why do we tip anyway? For sure, to show appreciation! Sometimes it should also be to share a little of what we have been blessed with!