



## BRITISH COLUMBIA MOUNTAIN GOAT SOCIETY

SMITHERS BC CANADA

MTGOATS@BCNORTH.CA

Newsletter #9

January 6, 2020

Greetings to all members,

It's winter and time to let you know what's happening.

### **New Videos**

We have posted two new videos on YouTube.

“Ready for the Rut” We were lucky to get video of three billies just before the rut started.

“One Tough Goat” We follow a young goat recovering from a serious injury.

Go to our newly updated channel at

<https://www.youtube.com/user/oreamnos2012>

Click on Videos to see all 28 videos



One of our local wolves standing on a mountain goat trail.  
No goats were on the trail at the time.

## A Big Story

Mountain goats have lived in British Columbia for 40,000 years. Or is it 90,000 years? Depends on who you ask. Anyway you cut it, mountain goats have lived in BC from before the last ice age, the Fraser glaciation. The weather 30,000 years ago was much the same as today. Glaciation started with cooling temperatures and a lot of snow about 25,000 years ago. About 18,000 years ago valley glaciers grew until they topped mountains and formed an icefield 2400 m (7874 feet) in elevation.

The Fraser ice covered all of BC, southern Yukon and the northwest US states. The glaciation extended east where it bumped up against the Laurentide glaciation that covered most of Alberta and all the rest of Canada.

The dome of ice that covered BC was centred over Burns Lake, BC. The only peaks that stuck out of the icefield were the few peaks more than 2400 m tall such as Hudson Bay Mt and the Seven Sisters. Otherwise BC looked like the ice cap on Greenland or Antarctica. Needless to say, all the trees in BC were buried under the glaciation as well as all alpine plants. Most mountain goats that lived in BC during glaciation probably suffered starvation and death on their home mountains.

About 15,000 years ago, the weather started to warm. By 13,000 years ago some valley bottoms were ice free. By 10,000 years ago, glaciers retreated to where they are today. Land in BC went from ice to bare rock to brush and shrubs. As the land warmed, trees began to grow and wildlife repopulated the province from central Yukon, coastal BC and the western states such as Oregon, Utah and Nevada. As the ice melted, life moved back in. And that included a major influx of humans that crossed the Bering Strait land bridge 10,000 to 13,000 years ago.

Mountain goats lived alongside mammoths, horses, camels and short-faced bears in BC during the early stages of the Fraser glaciation. All those species were extinct by 10,000 years ago.

Research by geneticist Aaron Shafer (new member) shows that two populations of mountain goats survived the glaciation. A northern group was located on ice-free islands of southeast Alaska. A southern group lived in the Rockies in southeastern BC. The two groups dispersed across BC until they met halfway, somewhere near Smithers and Terrace BC. The two groups were not separated long enough to form two distinct species but are all one species.

The glaciation in BC at maximum measured 900 km west to east and 1800 km north to south. That means mountain goats kept moving from one mountain to the next over the last 10,000 years until the entire province was once again repopulated with mountain goats. Divide 900 km by 10,000 years and mountain goats moved across the landscape at an average of 90 meters per year. You have to wonder if this repopulation is still going on.

## **Watching an Extinction Happen**

We have monitored the mountain goat population on Mt. McKendrick near Smithers since 2011. The population has declined from 20 in 2011 to only six in 2019. The herd is made up of three nannies, two kids and one juvenile. We don't know the exact cause of the decline but there are clues. We would not be surprised to see the herd go extinct in several years.

The mountain summit is a destination for local snowmobilers. The sleds displace the goats every time they go to the summit. The sleds are on the summit every weekend all winter long and sometimes during the week. That's a lot of repeat displacement.

The best feed for the goats is on the summit meadows where the snowmobiles travel. The sled tracks compact the snow and make it more difficult for the goats to paw through to the dry grasses under the snow.

See our YouTube channel to watch the video on Mt McKendrick we produced in 2012 to persuade government to act. Needless to say nothing was done to keep sleds off the summit. We continue the effort.

## **Advocating for local goats part 1**

We learned that local snowmobilers cut a new trail into a local mountain. The sleds repeatedly travelled through the winter home of one of the mountain goat herds on the mountain. We let local government biologists know and then we submitted a proposal to prohibit motorized vehicles near the goats' winter home. The biologists agreed with us and our proposal is winding its way through approvals. In addition, we complained to the local sawmill staff about a new road that allowed access to the mountain. They have since deactivated the road and pulled two bridges to slow access for sleds and stop access for ATVs in summer.

## **Advocating for local goats part 2**

There is a very large mineral lick that is the subject of our video on mountain goat licks on our YouTube channel. Part of the lick is protected from forest harvest but the trail to the lick is not protected at all. We are working with the forest company to limit motorized access to the area and to extend protection to the trail. The forest company has deactivated two roads for us and is interested in protecting the trail. We are monitoring the trail with a camera over the winter and will continue the discussion with the forest company and government next spring.

## **Added a scientific paper**

We have added what may be the best paper on the mountain goat rut. View the paper at the top of the list at <http://bcmountaingoatsociety.ca/links.asp>

The findings of this paper raises questions about the wisdom of hunting regulations that stress the harvest of older mature males and rely on younger males to be successful in the rut. To summarize:

- 89% of males successful in breeding were 6 years of age or older
- Males 6 years or older made up 27-38% of total males one year old or older
- Older females were more successful raising young
- Older females may delay breeding in the presence of young males
- 37% of consort males were one of the two highest ranking males



The question is – if older males are harvested, will older females delay breeding with young males? And does that reduce the herd size?

### New signs

A mountain goat herd travels around Hudson Bay mountain each summer and spends days browsing on sedges within sight of downtown Smithers. We worked with BC government staff to install two new signs to inform hikers that they are approaching sensitive mountain goat habitat and that they should leash their dogs. This herd has declined from 22 in 2010 to nine in 2019.



Member Ron McNaughton with one of two new signs on Hudson Bay Mountain

Until next time - Cheers

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