

# IT'S TIME

After a lifetime of pursuing big game trophies from Missoula to Anchorage, 83-year-old Mavis Lorenz hands her rifle over to the next generation. **BY NOELLE NAIDEN**

**I**N MONTANA, IT'S NOT UNUSUAL TO MEET a woman who hunts. But it is surprising to meet one who hunts on her own, has chased game animals for more than half a century, and has taken many big game trophies—including one of the largest bighorn sheep ever killed in Montana.

Mavis Lorenz, 83, is a woman of endless passions and interests. The Missoula resident has served on Montana's Private Lands/Public Wildlife Council, volunteered for a federal grizzly bear DNA study, and taught fishing to Missoula grade-schoolers. She has competed at the masters level in track and cross-country ski racing (the latter internationally), taught physical education at the University of Montana, and assisted with FWP's Becoming an Outdoors-Woman workshops. The 114-pound adventurer has also motorcycled through Mexico, kayaked Idaho's Lochsa River, rafted the Middle Fork of the Salmon River, and hiked extensively in Europe and Asia. In the 1970s, she earned her pilot's license.

In the meantime, she has hunted for almost every North American big game species, in Alaska and Canada but mostly Montana. "I love the different challenges hunting offers," Lorenz says. "One is trying to find an animal on its home ground and outfoxing that critter. You might not see what you're hunting for, but you'll always see something interesting if you go out."

Hunting has been Lorenz's sustaining heartbeat since she was a girl growing up in rural Wisconsin, where she was taught by her

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**ALASKA CARIBOU** Lorenz has shot nearly every North American big game species.

mother, a crack shot. "Oh could she shoot that .22," Lorenz says. "There wasn't a rabbit left in the garden after 24 hours when she picked up that gun." By age 12, Lorenz was allowed to take the family's .410 shotgun by herself and hunt squirrels. "I had to go alone, because my folks thought two kids with a gun were riskier than one," she says.

During World War II, when commercially sold meat was rationed, hunting was a serious affair for Lorenz's family. "We'd start in the fall when the squirrels were big enough to eat," she says. "I was given only three shells. If I didn't bring a squirrel back, I was reprimanded. In our family, if you wanted to hunt you'd better get something, so I did."

Lorenz never lost that desire to succeed as a hunter. After moving to Montana in 1954 to teach at the University of Montana, she began hunting with a group of men who worked at the Bonner mill. One of her most memorable outdoors experiences was an elk hunt with the group. "We were up Ninemile Prairie in one guy's old station wagon," Lorenz says. "We ran into a small bunch of elk that crossed in front

of us, and Blackie said, 'Who wants it?' I said, 'I do—and don't follow me!' There was a little grassy draw, and this elk was silhouetted on the other side. I sat down in the snow and peeled off a shot. It fell and slid down the hill. I kept shooting, and then I heard Blackie's voice, 'For God's sake, Mavis, stop shooting! It's dead!'"

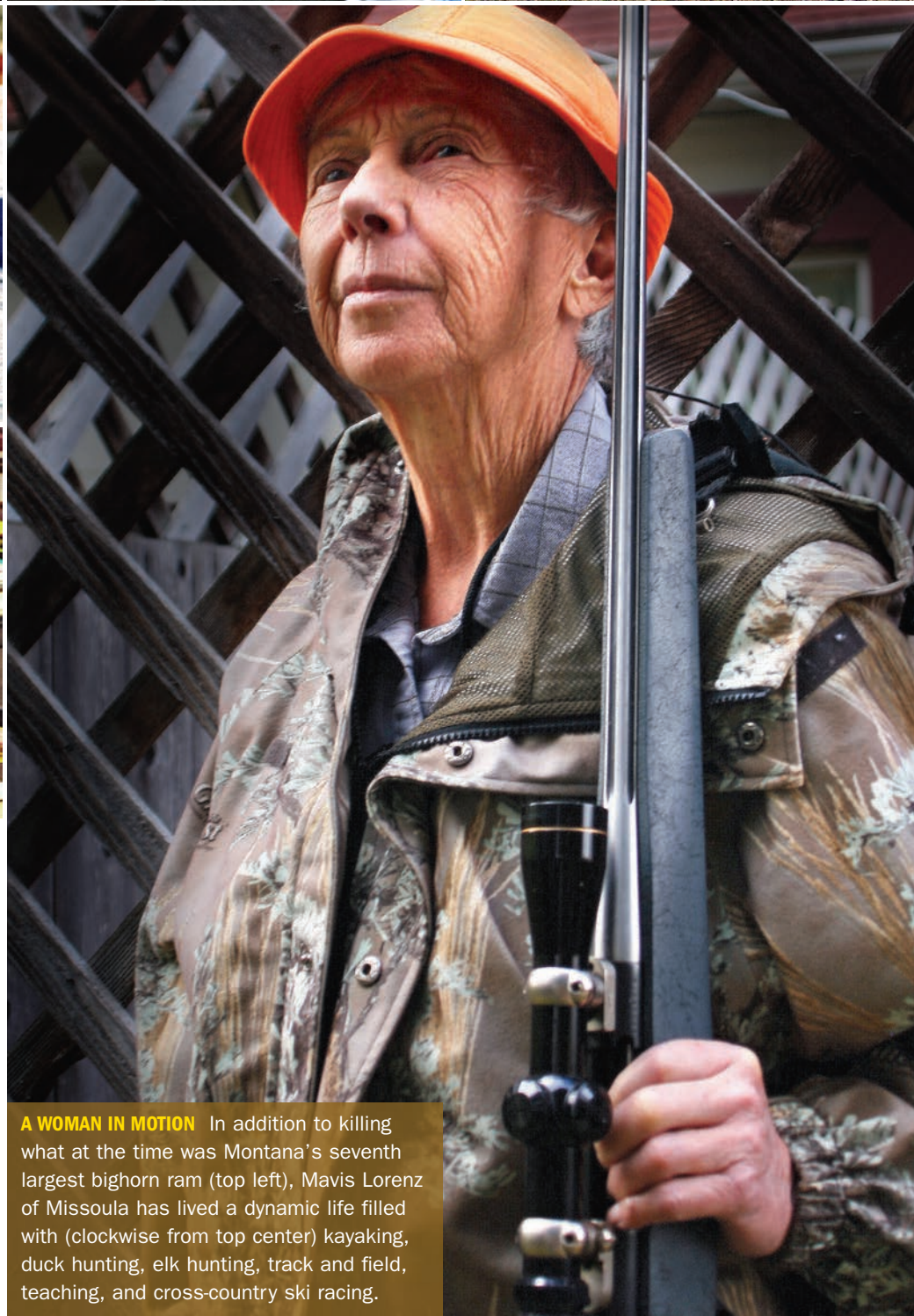
Another unforgettable hunt was in the Rock Creek area, where, at age 66, Lorenz shot what at the time was the seventh largest bighorn sheep ever taken in Montana and the largest killed in the state by a woman. Lorenz says it took 18 years of applying before she finally drew the coveted bighorn ram permit. After reading everything she could find on Rock Creek bighorns, she obtained a video showing how to determine if a ram had trophy-sized horns. "I studied that video upside down and backwards," she says.

On the day Lorenz killed the ram, she stalked a group of three large sheep to within 60 yards. All three were facing her. "You have to judge the size of the hole in the curl, and to see how big the hole is, the sheep has to stand sideways," she says. When the middle ram finally turned, Lorenz saw it had the thick beam and extensive curl she'd learned to identify from the video. She aimed the rifle and squeezed the trigger. The Boone and Crockett certificate for the ram, which scored 200 1/8, lies on the floor of her living room, next to a reproduction of the horn and a bookcase full of travelogues, topo maps, and hunting journals. The massive full-body mount adorns a wall at the Bob Ward store in Missoula.

Last fall Lorenz shot a cow elk in what was her final hunt. A remarkable woman with extraordinary physical gifts, she now has an autoimmune disease that depletes her energy. What's more, macular degeneration has deteriorated her vision, preventing her from seeing well enough to shoot an animal without the chance of wounding it.

"I can't even see the crosshairs on the scope," she says. "Nope, it's time. Time to hand my rifle off to someone younger." Lorenz tells me she plans to give the gun to her grandnephew.

Then she eyeballs me a moment and says, "You know, before I send that gun off to him, I could teach you how to handle it so you could go out in the fall." 🐾



**A WOMAN IN MOTION** In addition to killing what at the time was Montana's seventh largest bighorn ram (top left), Mavis Lorenz of Missoula has lived a dynamic life filled with (clockwise from top center) kayaking, duck hunting, elk hunting, track and field, teaching, and cross-country ski racing.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: CHAD HARDER; COURTESY OF MAVIS LORENZ; MAVIS LORENZ; CHAD HARDER; MAVIS LORENZ; MAVIS LORENZ; MAVIS LORENZ