





Every Picture Tells a Story

# Vertically Challenged

by Bob Cook

When they said ‘goats,’ I was initially doubtful because of the many ‘goats’ that have in the past turned into ‘sheep’ upon closer scrutiny. Unlike sheep, goats have beards and long black horns. But the three hikers who had entered our gallery were not mistaken, and they had their iPhone images to prove it.

Wow! Right here in K-Country I was gifted with the opportunity to capture gallery-worthy images of a species that had eluded me thus far. I could barely contain my excitement as I ushered the trio out the door, with a promise of prints as reward for their kind tip if I should find success with my camera’s shutter.

Having gathered GPS-like coordinates, I embarked on the bike, hike and climb excursion that would take me within reach of an encounter that until now I had only dreamed about. Once above the treeline, I started questioning the wisdom of packing the weight of an SLR, telephoto lens and tripod, while also calculating how long it would take them to find my body if a slip turned into a fall.

Several hours passed by, as the distant white boulders with their illusion of movement, played games with my mind. A vivid imagination produced dozens of goat encounters, each involving full-frame portraits, catch-light and warm shadows. This dreaming wasn’t helping. Clearly, the elevation and looming storm clouds were threatening to end this charade, and I needed to focus if I was to catch some movement for real. I waited, listened ... and waited some more. At one point I imagined that getting to higher ground would help. I climbed as high as my nerves would take me, but then quickly retreated

when sane thinking kicked in. I was ready to pack it all in when, with the faintest of sounds, I heard a rock fall in the direction of the cliff that had just been descended. Unbelievably, just metres away from where I had been perched, there was a nanny with movement at her feet. As I watched them disappear from sight, a compelling voice from within prompted a rapid yet careful pursuit.

The climb upward was charged with adrenaline as I scrambled past the large boulders and over scree. My estimates of elevation and direction were accurate, but I had failed to anticipate the trail ending beneath my feet: a shear drop that made forward movement impossible. I was disappointed to say the least. Where could they have gone? I surveyed the mountain’s plunging cleavage and had given up hope, when a peripheral glance revealed four eyes looking back from across the chasm. At eye level, as if awaiting my arrival, they were safely framed in a rocky cleft – posing just long enough for me to capture a dozen images. Soon after, the little one found a safe spot behind Mom and both settled down for a rest. It was one of my most amazing wildlife encounters to date, leaving me only with the task of getting back down safely to share the story.

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Bob Cook and his wife Candy are wildlife photographers who own and operate Branded Visuals Inc. and The Wildlife Gallery, located in Bragg Creek.

You can view their full collection of wildlife imagery at [www.brandedvisuals.com](http://www.brandedvisuals.com)