

# Mountain Hunter™

*Fair chase... No fences™*

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**Guide Outfitters**  
Association of British Columbia  
*Wildlife Stewardship is our Priority™*





## ABOUT SHANE

Shane Mahoney is considered one of the leading international authorities on wildlife conservation. A rare combination of historian, scientist and philosopher he brings a unique perspective to wildlife issues that has motivated and inspired audiences around the world. Named one of the 10 Most Influential Canadian Conservationists by Outdoor Canada Magazine and nominated for Person of the Year by Outdoor Life Magazine, he has received numerous awards including the Public Service Award of Excellence from the government of Newfoundland and Labrador and International Conservationist of the Year by Safari Club International. Born and raised in Newfoundland he brings to his writings and lectures a profound commitment to rural societies and the sustainable use of natural resources, including wildlife and fish.

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Over long and now misted millennia the rhythm of our human existence was the same. Pursuing our sacred and relentless desire to survive, we hunted and gathered the living things that miraculously suited our physical needs for food and warmth. Across endless wild environments we perfected the one great arc of our existence, the first great act of globalization. We marched slowly out of Africa and encircled our world, driven by need and curiosity and fuelled by the death of wild others. Perfecting the weapons within, we fashioned the stone, honed bone and wood, and hunted our way to modernity. Against nearly impossible odds, we developed a pathway to existence that was to become the hallmark of our species and the most enduring portal to our natural selves.





# CONSERVATION MATTERS™

with Shane Mahoney

## Hunting and the Art of Human Existence

We became the greatest hunters the natural world had ever seen. No other species could match the range of our capacity or the limitlessness of our inventions. Small, slow and fragile, our children rose to strength and stature on the flesh and bone of wild brethren. Upon our campfires roasted the great and fierce giants of the animal world. Along ocean margins and ice field skirts and from endless steppe to brooding mountain peak man the

hunter excelled, our very existence testimony to the most eloquent equation ever derived: energy and matter are interchangeable. The flesh we consumed became the flesh we were; the blood we drained became the river of our lives. Man and animal became inseparable; life and death were but a circle. A long way down this road a man would eventually write this equation down. When he did, we would revere him and call him the

greatest physicist of all time. In reality he was just a wild eyed hunter, running down the truth! Both his mind and his pen were surely the inventions of his hunting past.

Thus we see the inseparable tie between our history and our future, the seamless flow of our existence. Man was, however, gathering far more than the flesh of fruit and the blood of animals as he hunted the landscapes around him. He was also endlessly

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discovering the secrets of the natural world. Through patient study he was coming to understand our place in the unending cycle of death and resurrection. Evening fires illuminated the deep impressions of his experience. He had witnessed the cunning of the great carnivores and the vigilance of the prey, and the intense but pitiless death that lay in between. He knew that each animal lived a different life and was to be found in a different place. He had noted their differences and exploited their frailties. Through his butchering he knew what they ate and something of how their bodies worked. He recognized his craving for fat and was aware of the best season to secure it. He came to know when the rivers were full, when the rookeries were alive, and when the plains would squirm with new life. Consciously suspended in the wondrous web of life human hunters would become the first ecologists.

Along this miraculous way, the hunter also came to understand the profound implications of a male and female world. He had observed the wondrous bond between wild mother and

offspring. He had watched as tiny new forms were birthed and females turned to consume the sack from which they writhed. He knew the significance of the white liquid that flowed at this time. He was enthralled by the ferocious passions of males in rut, passions that allowed him to approach and kill them, and he came to understand the function of display and ornamentation in their mating strategies. He could appreciate the flash of antlers, the costumes and colors of the strutting male, the dancing of cranes.

Slowly, but certainly, he began to understand the need of all this complexity, how it was assembled and why it was required to ensure both animal existence and his own future. But there was still more! Transformations were everywhere and easily understood. Lush grasses became fat deer from which the wolf pup was spawned. Human females well-nourished on the grease and loins of animals grew ripe and full in turn. Their bellies seethed with life, their eyes with hope, their manes glistened in the sun.

This knowledge bore witness to the indivisibility of life and even the miracle of transubstantiation was no rare thing. Indeed, did not flowers grow in abundance where the mammoth were butchered? Further, should not his own dead be given back to the earth, interred to commence their decomposition to another form? In coming to understand this great cycle of life, death and

rebirth the human animal explored the boundaries of reality, the horizons of existence. Finally, he would acknowledge the wondrous parallels between the lives of animals and his own needs and emotions. Animals would become our brothers, just as native cultures everywhere would remind us. Somewhere along this road philosophy was born.

So it was surely inevitable that art and spirituality would rise in the human species. Faced with a world of startling fullness, yet with existence a struggle for all, man was led to question his own origins and the purpose of his existence. He saw the wondrous complexities around him, but where in all of this magic and mayhem did he fit? An expanding brain, fuelled by animal protein and an increasing emphasis on tool use and manufacture, carried with it the increased capacity to reason, and reflect. Falling sometimes to the great predators that pursued him, and at others elated by the kill of great beasts that his weaknesses should have denied him, the hunting human prevailed and saw the world through a primate's eyes but with a predator's vision.

Thus it was that hunting cultures the world over developed rich mythologies centered upon the natural world, seeing in the kill an act of the inevitable and a gift from some power whose identity they might only imagine but whose munificence prophesied that man was indeed special, and deserving. As his magnificent cave art suggests, man thus ceased to instinctively participate in the kill and began his journey towards an intellectual and spiritual tie with both his hunting lifestyle and the magnificent creatures upon which he depended for survival. Theriomorphs, those half human and half animal figures displayed on cave walls and ceilings, abundantly attest to his recognition of the inseparableness of life and a shamanistic journey to other dimensions and realities. He

*The Guide Outfitters Association of British Columbia (GOABC) wants to start a fundamental shift among hunters from caring about hunting to caring about all wildlife. Ranchers care about cattle and anglers care about fish, but hunters seem to only care about their sport. Hunters must be committed to the responsible use of wildlife resources and passionate about preserving a diversity of wildlife species. The GOABC is a strong supporter of the North American Wildlife Conservation Model, which stipulates that law and science should be manage wildlife. This model is the result of hunters and anglers who were dedicated conservation. As anti-hunting pressure becomes louder, it becomes increasingly important to continue and enhance the legacy of the hunter conservationist.*





would come to believe that animals gave themselves to him, as we modern hunters must sometimes suspect. Thus was the hunting human transformed, no longer a brute creature who killed with indifference but one who could worship the beauty and grace of the wild others around him and who could be convinced that hunting was not only something that was, but something that always had to be. In this world and the others he visited in trace like states, always the wild others were essential

companions, more than just meat and marrow now, they emerge the very essence of his own self awareness.

It was through the hunt that we came to an understanding of the very nature of existence. At a crucial point in our journey we stepped away from the path of others and re-entered nature in a more vital and conscious way. Our metamorphosis to winged intellectual carried aloft the notions of art and beauty, the imaginings of parallel universes, the concepts of resurrection and transubstantiation,

the logic of empirical observation and the miraculous preoccupation with trying to find a purpose for it all. Biologically as constrained as ever, humanity was set free in the truest sense of the word. These deepest parts of our humanity are not the constructs of modernity, of Newtonian science or Judaeo-Christian beliefs. They were already emergent and fully formed when the hand held spear was still being thrust through the mammoth's ribs.