

Pronghorn
August 8, 2020 New Mexico

Jeremiah 14:22 “Do any of the worthless idols of the nations bring rain? Do the skies themselves send down showers? No, it is you, LORD our God. Therefore our hope is in you, for you are the one who does all this.”

I refused to let the torture break me. Heat, boredom, visions of cool drinks and swimming pools...I vowed nothing would derail me from my goal to fill the first pronghorn tag I'd drawn in New Mexico after having applied for over two decades. The odds really aren't THAT bad, but for some reason I just haven't been able to pull a tag.

While I can spot and stalk with the best of them, it's no secret that hunting water is the more likely method to arrow a pronghorn in the flatland they call home. If one can withstand the torture. And if monsoons don't hit. Being optimistic that dry weather would prevail, I equipped my blind (AKA sweat lodge) with a portable swamp cooler air-conditioner, plenty of water, a cooler full of ice, a book, and a tub in which to douse my Sitka lightweight Core Hoody to allow evaporation to help keep me cool.

I parked my truck in the wee hours of the morning and hiked across the desolate landscape by headlamp. It was downright chilly despite knowing the temperature reach well into the 90s later in the day. I settled in for what would be the first of many tortuous days...



All geared up for a looonnggg wait...



At first light a trio of pronghorn meandered across the horizon

Later that day a Long-billed Curlew landed and poked around (I admit I had to look this guy up in a bird book later). I had never heard of them before this trip, but I suspect this one had a trophy length beak!



Long-billed Curlew

A pronghorn doe headed for water but stalled and bedded about 50-yards out. I hoped this live decoy might be just the ticket to entice a buck to come for a drink.



Alas that first day ended without any other activity besides songbirds. It had been hot, but bearable, and I had high hopes for the future. I could see pronghorn in all directions throughout the day so assumed it was only a matter of time. And continued dry conditions.



The sunset was worth the wait...

As I hiked back to my truck the night air was cooler, but still plenty warm enough for my headlamp turn up this fellow. Thankfully he was quite some distance from my blind, but I made a mental note to double-check its interior before committing to enter the next morning!



Don't Tread on Me

Dry weather continued and the next few days passed with one small buck and several does watering at various times, a couple of nice bucks staring at the blind from hundreds of yards out, miscellaneous smaller animals and birds passing by...and heat.



Dandy buck that just wouldn't commit to the water



This lean fox trotted by one morning



Another reptile slithering after dark



Yet one more good buck seemingly immune to thirst

One day a rainstorm skirted past me just a little too close for comfort. The rainbow was beautiful, but I was thankful no rain fell directly in my area.



Dark and stormy not too far off



The beginning of another hot day



Various birds visited frequently



This guy seemed to want a drink, but couldn't reach the water



This raven kept playing with what I assumed was a mole skull



Small buck that tempted me early in the hunt



These nasty caterpillars began showing up on the second day. They are known for an irritating sting and I got a couple of zingers on my ankles during my hike out in shorts.



As if knowing he was safe from my arrow, this buck bedded about 40-yards out after drinking.

Finally, in the afternoon of the 5th day a really nice buck began a beeline in my direction from nearly half a mile out. He would occasionally stop to nibble grass, but each time he raised his head he would resume his progress toward me. At about 100-yards out he made a big zigzag and then approached the far side of my tank. Having watched several other pronghorn quench their thirst, I knew they rarely hung around for long after they were finished. I wasn't overly happy with the buck's slightly quartering-to position but at a mere 25-yards I was confident I could put an arrow where I wanted to and lined my pin up to avoid bones and get to vitals.



Death missile on the way!

The buck dropped slightly as the arrow reached him, but not enough to make any difference. I was surprised he went down in his tracks, blood gushing from the wound. Finding a wounded buck after his death-run across the open country would have been easy, but I'll take a short tracking job any day!



Where he lay



Slick Trick Viper have never let me down



My first NM pronghorn!

As I took photos clouds began to build in earnest. Soon a few raindrops began to pitter-patter, and I initially thought it was nice and would help keep me cool while I butchered. Next thing I knew the heavens broke loose and released a torrential downpour! I barely had time to race to my truck for shelter before the deluge was upon me. I killed my buck just in the nick of time because the desert would be wet for days, effectively shutting down hunting at a water hole because puddles would be everywhere.



Start building the ark!

After half an hour the rain began to let up and soon I was able to butcher my buck, get the meat on ice, and pile my soggy gear into the back of my truck to point its nose for home. The sloppy conditions required 4wd and mud slinging off every tire as I spun and clawed my way back to the pavement.



Praise God for holding the rain back for an hour! The striking double rainbow highlighted God's perfect timing and made for a memorable drive back home after my successful hunt.