

Pronghorn 2021 August, New Mexico

Proverbs 16:3 “Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and he will establish your plans.”

After having been skunked for years, somehow Brian and I managed to draw pronghorn tags two years in a row, and we were tickled to get another chance at them. I took a nice buck last year, but Brian’s hunt was bamboozled by truck problems. This past Christmas his wife had surprised him with a low mileage used Toyota Tundra and his old Found-On-Road-Dead was a thing of the past. It was a relief to have a reliable rig, plus this year our scouting revealed an area we could hunt together, providing a backup vehicle just in case.

Weather around NM became wetter and wetter as our season approached. Great for animals, great for our drought and vegetation...but perhaps not so great to ambush thirsty animals at waterholes. Regardless, we prepared for our time afield and eagerly looked forward to another hunt for arguably North America’s most unique native species.

The day before season rain fell heavily. Brian arrived early and parked his trailer at a convenient parking area, but I had deal with work issues and then help Robin finish up an online summer chemistry class. Before I knew it, I was leaving Albuquerque hours later than planned, which delayed my arrival to camp until midnight. Much of my drive was through a rainstorm. Brian was already fast asleep, but we quickly made plans to try our hand at spotting and stalking bucks since the wet conditions would likely eliminate any need for bucks to drink at waterholes. I organized my gear and fell into my sleeping bag, not looking forward to the alarm set scant hours later.

The alarm chimed and I reluctantly roused myself. Honestly had I been alone I might have just slept in and written off the morning hunt, but I couldn’t let Brian down and besides, he’d probably never let me hear the end of it.



Opening morning sunrise – despite a significant lack of sleep, it doesn’t get much better

We piled into his truck and began searching for stalkable pronghorn. Sunrise was cloudy, but beautiful, and it didn’t take us long to spot a buck feeding on dew-covered grass, which was thick, tall, and green. With virtually no vegetative cover or undulations in the terrain, we decided to try stalking with pronghorn decoys, assuming the dim pre-dawn light would help fool the buck’s eyes and help us cut the distance. We slowly meandered toward the buck and at first it seemed to be working great. Surprisingly, he didn’t even seem to notice our approach as he grazed contentedly, often facing away from us. That changed abruptly when we reached about 200-yards. He snapped his head and stared our way. We were moving relatively slowly, acting like meandering pronghorn, so we froze and mirrored his curious stare. After several minutes we alternately meandered a few steps closer, all the

while trying to imitate a natural pronghorn. We made it to 165-yards, but that was all he would tolerate. He nervously walked away stiff-legged and began to head toward some does several hundred yards farther out. When he momentarily dropped into a shallow swale I ducked below his view and scurried diagonally toward him, using the scant cover as best I could before popping my pronghorn head into view. Once again, the buck didn't like it and after staring briefly, he trotted away. Strike one.



This buck wasn't interested in a decoy

Over the course of the day, we made stalk after stalk. Nothing seemed to get us closer than perhaps 100-yards. Even seemingly perfect setups and conditions resulted in failure and us looking like fools. Midday began to spit rain and after toughing it out for a little while we had to break down and don raincoats...definitely less than ideal conditions for hunting pronghorn. Despite the hard rain, water appeared to soak into the soil and the forecast called for hotter and drier conditions over the next several days, so by the end of day one we decided to sit at water the following day.

We arose early and went separate ways to begin long waits. I had a book, ice water, lunch, snacks, and a rechargeable fan. What I wasn't prepared for were the biting flies! Aye caramba, the wet weather had hatched hordes of them. Typically, when sitting in a hot blind I wear shorts and only a lightweight black long-sleeved top, but the flies were so bad I had to wear pants, socks and gloves plus cover my head! Even so they'd drill through my socks and pants when least expected. Brian reported faring no better and the little suckers were relentless.

Late morning, I had brief excitement when I nice buck approached. I readied my bow and started rolling video, but the buck simply trotted up, sipped, and immediately trotted away. I had time to range him, but before I could even dry my bow he was gone. I idly wondered why he had even bothered to come to the water, as he couldn't have swallowed more than a mouthful or two. Nevertheless, he was gone.



This buck only teased me

I settled back in and waited...and waited. During one peek from my hideout, I caught movement in the sand as a large horned lizard scurried past. He stopped briefly before disappearing into the weeds in search of insects. I hoped he'd eat a thousand biting flies!



Eat some biting flies, buddy!

I could see a few pronghorn far out on the prairie, but they appeared content to alternately feed, bed, and shake their heads; likely bothered by flies too. As the afternoon wore on and the temperature continued to rise, I spent less time reading and more time watching for thirsty pronghorn. At one point a small buck began to approach and I evaluated him through binoculars. To be legal bucks must have horns longer than their ears, but at best he was barely legal. I decided I would pass him up in hopes of something a little bigger. Ultimately the little buck bedded down about 90-yards out and after relaxing for half an hour, arose and meandered off, never even getting to the water to tempt me.



Little buck

Soon after the encounter I received a text from Brian “Big buck down!” After missing out the previous year I was thrilled for him. He indicated he didn’t need help and for me to keep hunting.



Brian and his trophy buck

Twice I spied bucks approaching from behind me just over a rise, once I could only see horn tips and the second, I could see the buck’s head and back, but both times they acted alert and after staring my way, angled past without approaching. I’m not sure whether they smelled me, were wary of my blind, or simply that vague 6th sense kicked in, but I didn’t have any close-range action for the remainder of the day. In the cool of the evening, I made my way to my truck and returned to camp to hear all about Brian’s success and admire his trophy. Unfortunately, I’d be setting my alarm for dark-thirty while slept in.

I replenished food, snacks, ice water and prepared my gear for the next day and then drifted off for a short night of sleep. The next morning, I arose quietly and headed to my blind for another mentally challenging day.

During the wee hours I dozed fitfully, constantly worried I'd be taken by surprise, so snapped my eyes open frequently. I had no action all morning but early afternoon a doe and nursing fawn approached the water without a care in the world. The doe drank for a long time and then grazed nearby on the lush vegetation for nearly 15-minutes before meandering away. I took it as a sign of good things to come.



Doe and nursing fawn

About 30-minutes later another doe and fawn trotted past within 80-yards but never veered toward the water. They fed and stood around for several minutes, which I hoped would attract some bucks I could see in the distance. Instead, the doe and fawn trotted off to the bucks. I settled back to waiting and dousing myself with water in a failed attempt to stay cool. At least the flies weren't as bad that day.

Suddenly I spied a nice buck approaching! He was making a beeline toward the water and something about his body language told me he was serious about getting a drink. I readied myself, started rolling video and tried to keep my nerves under control. The buck came to the pond nearly head-on, but slightly angled and a little below me so I could envision my arrow reaching vitals. As soon as he began to drink my arrow was on its way!



Arrow launched!

At the impact he reared and charged away on a death run. I lost sight of him in the tall grass but felt confident in my shot. I reviewed the shot in my mind and checked the video. Everything seemed good, but I waited 30-minutes before sneaking out to check for my arrow and any other clues. My arrow had broken as he whirled and ran, but it had great penetration given the path through bones and there was good blood on the shaft. I nocked another arrow and crept over the rise to discover my buck lying flat on his side - no long blood trail on this hunt! Although service was spotty, I texted Brian "Are you coming to help butcher?!"



Evidence on the arrow confirmed my confidence in the kill



Praise God for this buck! My first meat for the freezer this season.

I was nearly finished butchering when I heard the low rumble of a truck and Brian's headlights came into view. He apologized profusely for only just receiving my message and said he had come as soon as it had come through. He congratulated me and helped carry the meat to my cooler, take down my blind and load up all my gear, then it was back to camp for dinner and my own opportunity to sleep in. Our planning and preparation had paid off in spades – another double whammy with both of us tagging great trophies.