

Pronghorn Robin 2020 New Mexico

1 Corinthians 13:13 “Now faith, hope, and love remain — these three things — and the greatest of these is love.”

Robin was blessed to draw a pronghorn tag for a week later in the same area as me. Given our busy schedule this allowed me to scout for both hunts at the same time, plus she benefited from my real-time hunt recon.

At first glance one might think a rifle tag would be easy to fill, and while it is less difficult than a bow tag, the wide-open spaces that pronghorn call home often prove difficult to close the distance on these sharp-eyed sprinters.

Robin couldn't join me for scouting this year due to school and swim team demands, but I reported my findings and shared photos with her each time I returned home. The main areas I found pronghorn seemed conducive for both of our hunts.



Hawk nest in an abandoned windmill tower



Fuzzy chick with meat scraps still on his beak

During much of the summer the unit was bone dry, and it seemed permanent water sources would be key in concentrating animals; however, once patchy monsoons began some areas became lush and green while others remained largely brown. Several areas in which I hadn't seen any pronghorn suddenly became filled with happy grazers, but others became seemingly void of activity.

One funny photo I showed to Robin involved a pair of young bucks forming an optical illusion. I saw a few nice bucks too, although nothing that would be categorized as huge.



Rare double-headed push-me-pull-me doppelganger

My hunt wrapped up quite successfully and before we knew it, Robin was up to bat. The nights were mild, and we simply camped out in the back of our pickup near some other friends who would be hunting nearby.

That evening a solid buck made his way past our campsite almost within shooting range, but he must have had somewhere to go because he eventually disappeared over the horizon. And in that flat country that meant a LONG way off!



Solid buck wisely making tracks for somewhere else

Opening morning found us hiking in the dark to a pre-planned location near where I hoped some bucks would be feeding first thing in the morning. As Robin and I hiked the eastern sky was just beginning to lose its inky blackness when suddenly we heard alarm snorts. Dang it! We had unknowingly disturbed some antelope and they were close! It was way too dark to shoot, but I could barely make out 3 bucks nervously moving away from us backlit by the approaching dawn. We halted until they meandered over a small rise and then continued.

We sat down overlooking a broad swale that was lush and green, hopefully veritable salad buffet for the local wildlife. Dawn broke and songbirds began to sing and flit around us. The stars faded and the sky began to transform into stunning colors as we waited in silence just taking it all in and savoring the moment.

As the light allowed us to see farther a group of 5 bucks materialized in front of us. Unfortunately, they were on the far side of the swale and beyond our comfortable shooting distance. We had no cover and their location allowed no approach, so I quickly suggested we stay low and back off while the light was still dim so we could drop behind a small rise and cut the distance.

As soon as we were out of sight we hustled to a point we could peek back into the low area, but the bucks had kept feeding away from us and we found ourselves once again out of cover and too far away. We thought it might be possible to ease forward in a small drainage but almost immediately one of the smaller bucks snapped his head in our direction and stared. We froze but the others keyed in on his nervous posture and soon all began trotting back toward where Robin and I had originally sat.

I whispered to her to get ready to move and as soon as the bucks dropped out of sight we raced back to the exact spot where the grass was dimpled from our earlier sit. We popped up the shooting sticks got Robin seated comfortably and simply waited. Soon I glimpsed horns dancing above the grass in front of us really close...like archery range!

They disappeared but we had a commanding view and we both knew it was only a matter of time before the bucks exposed themselves. After several minutes the first buck fed into view about 100-yards out. He was one of the smaller ones. Don't get me wrong, we're not exactly trophy hunters, but 15 minutes into opening day we're going to pass on the little guys. Plus, we knew at least one if not two of the bucks in the group were respectable.

As more bucks filtered into view, I tried to identify the biggest one. They turned directly away from us, which not only presented a poor shot angle, but made it difficult to judge their horns and every feeding step put them farther away.

After a few minutes I identified the biggest buck and Robin was on him like a laser. All I could do was whisper the ever-changing distance and wait for him to turn for a reasonable shot. The bucks bunched up, meandered this way and that, and every time the big one turned broadside a little guy materialized directly in front or behind him. A lot of people would have jerked the trigger by then, but Robin is patient and ever since she's been a little girl there has been no rushing her to take a shot. If it isn't perfect or something doesn't feel right, Robin will pass every time.

Soon the distance reached 175, then 205. We generally like to be within about 200-yards for rifle hunts, but there was no wind and Robin was seated with a steady rest. The bucks continued...250, 275...I was just about to tell Robin we'd have to let them work their way over the next rise and try again when the big buck turned broadside and stopped in the clear. 280. Robin's longest shot ever. I told her if she was comfortable take it, but no pressure. Boom! We distinctly heard the report of a solid hit and the buck tore in a full gallop in a tight circle, his side nearly dragging the ground as he sprinted around like a dog chasing his own tail. One, two, three spins, then down and out! Robin had drilled him like a pro and the other bucks simply ogled at their leader, who appeared to have gone crazy and collapsed. The remaining four stared in confusion for a minute or two and then loped away.

We hugged in the thrill of the moment. Less than 30-minutes into season Robin had a great buck on the ground! Heck, we'd even be able to butcher him in the cool of the morning! Robin was tickled and laughingly announced this to be her shortest hunt ever.

I'm so proud of Robin and enjoy her company so much. The adventures we've shared have created memories that will last forever. It won't be long before she'll head off to college and then who knows? Then again, one never knows what the next year may bring.

Appreciate the time you're given with loved ones.



What a buck!



What an amazing morning!

P.S. Our friends had an equally successful hunt. The boy tagged out within half an hour of Robin, and later that afternoon we were able to help the girl kill a buck, which required two separate quarter-mile crawls to get her within range.