

SKULL

HUNTING JOURNAL

TONY'S

TALL

80

A SANDY HILLS HUNTING PUBLICATION

AUGUST 2023

THE FINAL HOUR

I met with my hunters on October 4th, the day before the opener of rifle antelope season. My clients were two long-time friends that traveled to Colorado in hope of sealing the deal on their first Antelope. We swapped hunting stories and shared photos of animals we harvested in the past that night at dinner. During that time, Tony mentioned to me that he had never shot an animal with four legs. I assured him we would change that.

The following morning, I picked up Tony and Gianni from the hotel, put everything in the truck and we headed to one of our ranches. I knew the ranch had potential for a big antelope because several had been spotted over the summer. It was about a 30 minute drive to our first destination and on the way there I began to realize these guys were having a friendly competition on who was going to harvest the biggest buck. We arrived at the gate of the ranch about 10 minutes before legal shooting light. As we sat there and waited for the sun to come up I had an good idea as to where these goats would be hanging out.



At first light we began our hunt and the guys decided Gianni was up to bat first. It wasn't long before we spotted a nice buck feeding. Gianni decided that was the one, not to mention he was in a great spot to close the distance on as we watched him through a spotting scope. We used what topography we had to our vantage as we snuck to the buck's last known position. As we cleared a small rise, glassing frequently, the buck was nowhere to be seen. I crawled up a little farther to where I could see over another small hill and there he was at 300 yards. I motioned for Gianni to advance to my location. After making the crawl, Gianni got set up, and squeezed off a perfect shot. The antelope ran 50 yards and down he went. After a short celebration we walked up to the goat as Gianni could not wait to get his hands on him. When we got to the buck, we noticed he was a little bigger and more unique than we originally thought. Gianni had set the bar high and the talk began! Now, it was Tony's turn. We finished driving through the ranch and found a couple really respectable bucks, but nothing that would quite out do Gianni's in order to secure full bragging rights, so Tony decided to pass on them. As we made our way off the ranch, it was time to move on to the next place.

The next place I had in mind also had some big bucks on it. We pulled off on a small two-track road that divides the ranch in half and started glassing. We found a couple really nice bucks, that at the moment, were in an impossible spot to stalk. The action was starting to get really slow as the day went on. We kept on pushing and moving our way through the ranch until we found another herd of antelope with a big buck. However, they were also in a difficult spot, so we elected to leave them and see if they would reposition by morning. Finally, about an hour before the sun was going to set we spotted a absolute stud Antelope. He was out feeding with a doe close by his side and two other bucks off in the distance. I put the spotting scope on him and could tell that he was definitely one that Tony would squeeze the trigger on. Although I knew it would be difficult to get within range with light fading, we decided to try since this goat appeared to be close to 80 inches. Certainly the buck of a lifetime and worthy of bragging rights. We had close to a 10 mph wind and the sun was sinking toward the horizon quickly. I knew we had to hurry, but still be stealthy with three of us in the wide open. I put the sun in our favor and off we went. Tony had previously

80"



**"THIS
BUCK**
was everything
we thought and
more!"



told me that he was comfortable shooting out to 600 yards. After covering some distance, my first range on the buck was 1500 yards. I knew we had to move quickly or we would not get an opportunity on this goat tonight. We kept pushing and walking in a single file line. I told the guys if we can get to that group of fence posts, I think the buck will be about 600 yards away and that's our only opportunity. We had finally cut the distance and were getting close to the fence posts. I repositioned to get all the posts stacked next to each other in a line so we could use them to hide our movement. We had minimal margin for error. We eventually made it to the posts, giving Tony a solid shooting rest. I almost couldn't believe that the entire group of antelope hadn't moved 20 yards since we spotted them. Tony knew this was his only opportunity for the night and took a minute to relax. I got my rangefinder out and ranged the buck at 528 yards. They had no idea we were there, so Tony took his time, got steady, and squeezed off a shot. The buck dropped in his tracks!! Tony and Gianni couldn't believe what just happened. Gianni and I gave Tony a high-five and we all celebrated as he had just shot an antelope of a lifetime.

We still had a 528 yard walk to take photos, so we would have to continue the celebration as we walked because the sun was fading fast! We got to the buck as the sun just began to sit on the horizon. This buck was everything we thought and more! Tony was still in disbelief and couldn't get over how truly big this animal was and what a great hunt we had in the process. He made sure Gianni knew he had just shot the bigger buck between the two, and the friendly bet was over! Congratulations Tony on a once-in-a-lifetime eastern Colorado giant!