

SKULL

AN OUTFITTER'S JOURNAL

JOHN FREEMAN'S
GIANT
ANTELOPE



83 INCHES OF GOAT

SHHC
APRIL 2021

ONE FOR THE BOOKS



Eastern Colorado is not necessarily the first place that comes to mind when one dreams about chasing B&C quality Pronghorn. With a B&C minimum score of 80 to get into the record book, the Pronghorn must grow a truly incredible set of horns. As you can imagine finding a Pronghorn that stretches the tape past 82 (the all-time record book minimum) is extremely rare to say the least. Throw in the fact that Pronghorn are one of the hardest North American animals to field judge accurately, and you now have a challenge on your hands!

Jonathon Freeman first hunted with me in 2018 on an archery mule deer hunt. As you know, if you have hunted deer in Eastern Colorado before, there is plenty of time to converse while driving over the vast expanses of seemingly endless ag fields, CRP, and sandhills. We routinely come across hundreds,

if not thousands of antelope over the course of the deer hunt. That almost always strikes up a conversation or two about hunting them. Jonathon had been on several pronghorn hunts before so we had plenty of stories to share. Between the stories and seeing how healthy the herd was his interest eventually perked enough to book a combo Rifle antelope and archery mule deer hunt the following year. I assured him that we would take our time and if he could overcome the tedious task of filtering through hundreds of “good” bucks we would find a great buck.

The time for Jonathon’s 2019 combo hunt had arrived, and although I had several good antelope and mule deer bucks located I hadn’t found any monsters yet. By the time the rifle Pronghorn season in Eastern Colorado starts the rut is winding down and that can get some of the bucks (especially the

mature ones) traveling to cover the few remaining does still in heat. That knowledge coupled with the fact that we were hunting the final three days of the rifle season made it an easy decision to focus on filling his Pronghorn tag before we dove into his archery mule deer hunt.

The first day was great, we saw a lot of antelope and several really good bucks, but we weren’t able to turn up “the buck.” We joined the other hunters and guides for dinner that night. We ate great and got to hear their stories of success, woes of some missed opportunities, some of the comedic genius that only happens in the field, and ultimately some discussion as to where to go and what could be in store for the next day’s adventures. Jonathon and I decided to check a different area the second day which started out very promising as we found a buck that was close to what we were looking for,

but after staring at him through the spotting scope for a considerable amount of time we decided that he just wasn’t quite what we wanted. However, remembering the stories from the night before, I knew that this buck would be a personal best for one of the clients that still had an unfilled tag. We made a quick call and almost immediately had guys on their way to take a look at the buck. We kept an eye on him until they got there, then left the situation in Jordan’s hands. It wasn’t long before we got news that they were able to close the distance and Jordan had a very happy hunter on his hands.

Shortly after that, we found ourselves staring at what looked to be an extremely heavy buck with prongs that seemed to go on forever! As I know full and well from two miles away and with heat waves, looks can sometimes be deceiving. We had to get closer and find out if this was the buck we

were after. He was across a long narrow flat surrounded by sandhills, so our plan was to get on the down-wind side and use the surrounding hills as cover to circle around to him. He was on the move so we knew by the time we got around to a better spot we may have some trouble picking him up again in the rolling hills and draws. However, we finally made our way around and snuck up on a hill that overlooked the area he was heading towards. You can imagine the excitement we felt when we saw that he had only made it about 200 yards from where we had last seen him, and incredibly, he bedded down directly below the hill we were glassing from - less than 300 yards away! Even better yet, he was bigger than we had originally thought. He had good curls and more mass that I gave him credit for originally. Bottom line, he was BIG, and we were in a great position! As we were trying to get Jonathon set up to take a shot the buck came to his feet and before long he was getting his does up and started pushing them down a draw, not alarmed, but almost as if some sixth sense told him to go find another place to take a nap. Unfortunately for us, we could not get steady for a shot before he had disappeared into a draw. We had to back off the hill we



83

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were on, but then could slip around and use the hills as cover as we paralleled them and could hopefully catch them coming out the other side of the draw. Fortunately, we had plenty of cover to work with because we had to hurry. Our plan ended up working perfectly, except he was no longer with his does.

My stomach started to sink as I began glassing other areas trying to turn him up. I filtered through several scenarios of what could have happened and where he could have gone. Eventually, I found him about 1200 yards away and realized that he found a smaller buck and ran him off from his does while we were sneaking around on them. He was now making his way back to his girls and after a quick glance of the scenery we came up with a new plan.

We knew where he was heading and it looked like we had a great opportunity and plenty of cover to set up an ambush. We still needed to move up another 150 yards to get set up for a shot, but things were definitely looking good! We started making our way to our ambush spot by dropping into a small draw which kept us out of sight of the does and it put a small hill between us and the buck. After getting to the top of the small hill, I quickly surveyed the area with my binos which fortunately turned up nothing and allowed us time to get Jonathon set up for a shot. We made sure he was solid and comfortable. We didn't have to sit long before the buck emerged from behind a hill walking steadily towards his harem who were now starting to make their way out of the draw heading in our direction. The buck would stop occasionally to glance over his

shoulder making sure the smaller buck was keeping his distance. Each time I caught myself praying the little guy had got the message, given up, and wasn't going ruin our plan which was working out so perfectly. He was just under 600 yards at this point, but if he continued on his current path we would have a much better shot if we were patient. I am sure considering his pace it did not take long, but in our world it seemed to take an eternity! Our patience was eventually forced to take a back seat as he made it to about 400 yards and was threatening drop into another little draw which would put him out of sight again! We needed to take advantage of any opportunity he might give us before he got into the next draw. As luck would have it, he decided to stop one last time to look back before dropping out of sight. Little did he know the other buck was the

least of his worries. Jonathon was ready and waiting and I am not sure the big guy had even fully turned his head to look back when Jonathon squeezed off the shot. He put it right where he needed to from 350 yards and after watching the buck stumble after 20 yards he was down!

The high fives started flying and we quickly started to pack up and go check him out. There was definitely no ground shrinkage with this guy as he ended up green grossing 83-3/8 inches which made him Jonathon's biggest pronghorn to date! After a photo session we took care of the meat, the cape, and enjoyed the rest of the day as we knew the following day we would be turning our attention to finding and chasing a big muley!

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