

# BEYOND MADE IN U.S.A. 7 8 P.R. APP'D. 9 252 Tc the SCORE

JUSTIN E. SPRING | ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF BIG GAME RECORDS

## MobyLope Hunter: Rebecca Spring Told by: Justin Spring

Montana is not a state in which long draw odds and years of anticipation build as you await the successful notice for the opportunity to hunt. Instead, the majority of the state is a general tag, and this particular antelope area is the same for the archery antelope permit.

Last year, I had drawn the antelope rifle tag and my wife had the archery license so we formulated our method: bow hunt hard with an emphasis on scouting what we wanted to go after during the later rifle season. The area is thick with speed goats, and I would estimate we looked at well over 150 bucks more than the previous two seasons. While a ground blind over a water hole would have most likely resulted in shot opportunities with the archery equipment, we are spot-and-stalk fans because it's more about the hunt than the kill. We find spot-and-stalk hunting more rewarding—even though we don't have many pronghorns in the freezer or on the wall.

The archery season started out the same as previous years, except I was the one with the archery tag. We would hunt the first four or five hours of daylight, then go try to find some shade. Even if we wanted to hunt, the mirage was so severe that judging an animal wasn't anything more than a rough guess. A couple of weekends of this resulted in a few good bucks being spotted but nothing that was a jaw-dropper. I had tried a few stalks and let a few smaller bucks go, but I saw nothing that would go 75-plus, which was the level I had set for this year with my bow.

It was getting a little further into the season, and we had invited some friends up to camp to chase some antelope when we first spotted this goat. I had recently purchased a product that allows me to have ownership plat maps on my GPS so we were trying to locate a true giant on public land. This stud was probably a mile away, but even at that distance it looked like he warranted a closer look. We made our way up to a road, and I set up my scope. Right away I knew his cutters were the best I had ever seen; he looked to be about 15½ high and was all by himself. I asked the group if anyone else was interested,

and they all thought a stalk on a pronghorn through a cut wheat field was impossible—and they were correct—but I had to try. I used the slight depression of the field road with the final remaining stalks of standing wheat as my cover. I had an antelope suit on, complete with a small buck head—think Wisconsin cheese head, but as an antelope—which I intended to use to lure the buck into shooting range once I closed the distance to under 150 yards. I belly crawled 300 yards—foot by agonizing foot—down the dirt and rock road with dust constantly blowing in my eyes and sticking to every bit of exposed skin, which was now thoroughly covered in perspiration. I made my way unnoticed to

the last remaining clump of wheat before the final 125 yards or so. He had looked my way a time or two, but during every one of these stare-offs, my nerves prevailed and he would go back to feeding, sleeping, and whatever else it is an antelope does to pass the day. When I reached the final point of cover, I pulled on the hat and began my best interpretation of a challenging antelope. The buck instantly locked on and I could tell I was getting his attention. He began his antelope-wheezing challenge, to which I would respond by flaring my back and raking the standing wheat. Eventually, after around 45 minutes of the standoff, he decided that I was not a threat and turned his back to me,



This column is dedicated to those trophies that catch our eye as they come across the records desk at Boone and Crockett Club's headquarters. Some score high, some are downright entertaining, and many are just unique.

flared his rump, and bedded down. I knew this was my chance, so I slowly rose to my knees and as I went to clip my release to the bow string, I realized that somewhere in my belly crawl I had lost my release. I paused momentarily, contemplating my options. I knew if I could get him within 30 yards I would be more than good to shoot him with fingers, but in this current predicament, that range seemed a bit out of the question. I thought for a moment and decided to let him be. No other hunters were anywhere near this buck, and I didn't want to blow him off this block of public land because of an equipment failure.

**LEFT: Rebecca Spring with her hard earned 'MobyLope'. When Rebecca and Justin got up to him, they realized that in the few weeks since they had last seen him he had broken a prong, which from the early season photos would have gone over seven inches. BELOW: Rebecca spent two hours on her belly, crawling inch by inch the 400 yards through wide-open stubble.**



## REALTREE® OUTDOOR NEWS WITH BARBARA BAIRD

THE LATEST IN OUTDOOR HEADLINES...BLENDED WITH A FEW OPINIONS.



VISIT [WWW.REALTREE.COM](http://WWW.REALTREE.COM)  
HUNTING BLOGS

©2012 Jordan Outdoor Enterprises, Ltd. 1437-12A

The next day we returned and once again he was in the same area. I tried the same approach, but he had moved to private land, and I couldn't convince him to come back across no matter how annoying of a little buck I was. That week, that was all my wife and I could think about. She had taken some excellent photos through the spotting scope and we both would stare at them and try to come up with a legitimate score. Time

and again I was coming up with a number in the mid-80s. And that's when we named him "MobyLope." While we didn't come up with the original name, it fit well considering our obsession with this antelope. And, the fact that my wife shared my obsession made this shortcoming in our character okay. The two of us would try a specific tactic one weekend, then spend the drive back analyzing what worked and didn't work. The various tactics we attempted involved one decoy, three decoys, a full waterfowl cut-wheat suit, the wife dressed as an antelope, me dressed as an antelope, the wife dressed as a doe with me dressed as the buck. The animal always won, but the trials and tribulations we faced strengthened us both as hunters and as a couple. We saw each other at our best and worst and learned how each reacts in the face of a seemingly insurmountable task.

This continued on until the last couple weeks of archery season. Work pulled us away though, and as the rifle opener approached, our thoughts frequently returned to Moby. We drove over the night before and parked in the corner of the public ground a good hour before daylight. We both sat silently in the truck, watching every set of headlights continue on past the access road to other areas of the unit. When daylight came to the prairies, we eased our way out to the field and began to glass. As the light filled every last rolling hill and the sun reached a height well above the extended horizon, we realized he was gone.

We worked our way back to the truck and discussed what to do next. Realizing we had put all our eggs in a single basket, we began going to our favorite high points from where we had watched the buck during bow season. Antelope were plentiful, but Moby was nowhere to be found. While Rebecca was still positive about the hunt, a hint of disappointment tainted our conversation. We looked over a couple herds of antelope

and found a buck that looked fairly promising though he was well onto a chunk of private land. We were headed back out to look in an area where I had shot my buck the previous year. We hadn't seen anything extraordinary when we saw a truck coming down a field road. It was owned by the same landowner as all the private land surrounding this block of public so I figured it couldn't hurt to ask who we needed to talk to. It turned out he was, in fact, the landowner, and he gave Rebecca the go-ahead to hunt any of his ground as well as some intel of the neighbors and who we wanted to talk to about permission.


With this new information, our spirits were greatly lifted. We went back to all the antelope we had seen; Becca picked out the best buck and decided to make a stalk for a closer look. I set up the spotting scope and settled in to watch as she made her way out into the cut wheat. As she neared a rise I saw her take off her pack and rest my Ruger No. 1 .25-06 across it. My heart rate began to quicken as three antelope bucks appeared on the far hill across from her. I looked each over carefully; the final buck I glassed was Moby. At first I wasn't sure, since the definitive cutter was not visible, but as I looked over the two bucks he was with, it became apparent this was him. I watched the buck and Rebecca in the spotting scope, questioning at first in my mind, and then out loud, why she hadn't shot yet. She kept re-positioning, and the rifle shot never came.

Eventually the bucks disappeared into a small ravine, and I saw her returning to the truck.

I met her a few hundred yards into the field and began asking why she hadn't shot. Her response was she just couldn't get excited about the buck. At this point I was beyond frustrated, but I kept reminding myself, this was her tag now, and it wasn't my place to decide what she would be happy with. It was early afternoon, so we decided to head into town for a quick bite to eat. On this drive she could see my frustration and began to doubt her choice in not shooting. As we talked it over, I realized that she may not have been able to see the buck I was looking at. We devoured some poor fried chicken that had spent a few too many hours under a heat lamp and headed back to the area I had last seen Moby. We were just turning off the pavement when a herd of antelope appeared in one of the landowner's fields. I threw the spotting scope on the window mount and there he lay 600-700 yards out in the middle of a cut wheat field. I knew the odds were long but Becca was already throwing a shell in the rifle and cinching down her pack. He may have slipped her once but not again.

The next two hours she spent on her belly, crawling inch by inch the 400 yards through wide-open stubble. I was watching through the scope switching between her and the buck. As she closed the distance to three hundred I knew he

was in range of the rifle and she had the ability to hit at that distance but the stalk continued: 275, 250, 225... finally at 200 yards she held up in a patch of wheat left by the combine. I watched her place the rifle across the top of her binoculars, which gives you an idea of how little cover there was when a pair of ten-power Minox binos gets you up high enough for a clear shot. Then the wait was on. It didn't take as long as I expected for the buck to stand. The first shot caught him square, and a follow-up put him down for good. He never took a step. Over two months of hunting, extreme highs and lows of emotions and weather—all this, and we were rewarded with a hundred-pound pronghorn antelope. Neither of us would trade it for any other hunting experience we had ever shared. When we got up to him, we realized that in the few weeks since we had last seen him he had broken a prong, which from the early season photos would have gone over seven inches. As it is, he doesn't make book, but on this hunt we weren't looking for a score, just a mature buck. And that is what will be hanging on our wall to commemorate this experience for years to come. ■



Over two months of hunting, extreme highs and lows of emotions and weather—all this, and we were rewarded with a hundred-pound pronghorn antelope. Neither of us would trade it for any other hunting experience we had ever shared.