

BIG DADDY VS. BIG D

BEYOND THE SCORE

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B&C TROPHY OWNER

I remember thinking to myself, “In the event you have to hoof it, just pace yourself. Derik will walk you right into the ground. Then when it is time to take the shot the crosshairs won’t stand a chance, and you will for sure take a bad shot and miss.”

I wasn’t tired because Derik paced my steps for me, but still I managed to miss the 200-plus yard shot that I know Derik could make with his eyes shut.

You can say all you want, but for a rookie big game hunter like me, your guide can make all the difference if you’re right up front with him.

I missed that shot not because I wasn’t capable or because of buck fever—and by all means, not because I was winded. I missed it because of a rookie mistake; I failed to tell Derik that taking any shot with my body parallel to the ground just wasn’t going to work. Having injured my neck in sports when I was much younger doesn’t allow me to lie down and take that kind of shot. I should have let him know right away, and we may have ended the day much earlier than we did.

My first pronghorn might be my last, but what a specimen he turned out to be. Derik had been scouting him

for some time. He had learned his patterns and studied his horn growth, so he knew he was onto something pretty special. As it turns out, he, Derik, my future son-in-law had now turned guide because he unfortunately did not draw a tag. But I did—lucky me, but it meant work for him.

We had loaded our gear into the truck the night before the hunt, so when morning came, we were ready to grab coffee and hit the road. Surprisingly, the area we were hunting was not loaded with headlights or the rattling of restless, excited hunters. In fact, there was not a soul to be seen—good news, we said to

each other. A quick yawn, a stretch, and a last sip of coffee, and off we went.

It wasn’t long before a few goats showed themselves, but not Big Daddy—not the one Derik had been scouting. Not yet anyway. Spotting-scope-out, eyes-wide-open Mini Daddy showed himself. That’s the critter that if you didn’t look hard enough and got impatient, you might shoot him and be very disappointed. He looked just like the one we were after—but smaller. However, Mr. Patience himself knew better, and said, “Nope, not him.”

“Darn it.”

“Patience,” said Derik.

I survived the eight-mile walk, cactus attack, disappointment in the first missed shot, Derik’s relentless tracking and the 20 years I have on this guy. He did it. He got me a goat—a records-book pronghorn—a big boy. He got me Big Daddy.



Derik is a dedicated well-educated hunter of large game. His knowledge of firearms, landscape, animal and safety are outstanding. Derik teaches P.E. at his local elementary school in Rawlins, Wyoming. Combined the two together and you can see why physically he is up for the challenge of any hunt. Not to mention the challenge of educating our youngsters. Derik is a graduate of the University of Wyoming and former firefighter.

This column is dedicated to the system that supports the public hunting of public wildlife for all fair chase sportsmen, and the stories and trophies that are the result. Theodore Roosevelt strongly believed that self-reliance and pursuing the strenuous activities of hunting and wilderness exploration was the best way to keep man connected to nature. We score trophies, but every hunt is to some extent a way of measuring ourselves.



“He will show himself.” Sure enough, not long after Mini Daddy wandered off, Big Daddy showed himself in the area that Derik had been scouting.

Adrenaline flowing, the anticipation of the hunt was on. I never knew these animals were so smart. Following Derik’s lead and trying to match his steps with mine to minimize the noise is hard when his gate is longer than mine. Finding our way through the brush as quietly as we could, stopping when we had to, and then moving when Big Daddy allowed was fun, exciting, and a bit unnerving. Needless to say Mr. Pronghorn had no clue we were there because Derik tries to always put himself in a position that helps him, not the quarry. I think we were in

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firing range a couple of times, but Derik took his time, studied the goat, the wind, and any other animals that might give us away, and we moved closer. What a blast to watch this guy work. He had put us in perfect position when the pronghorn decided he wanted to backtrack and disappear over the hill. Missed opportunity? I don’t think so.

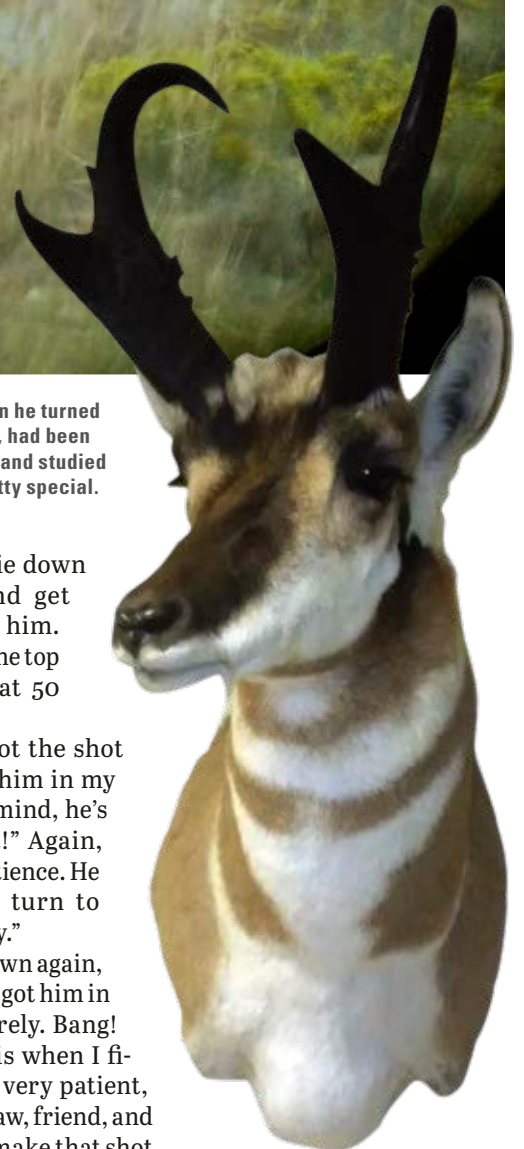
Derik knew we were still in a good position, knew the goat had still not winded us, and knew he still could get me closer—and he did just that. He got me within 50 yards. That’s when it happened.

In barely a whisper,

Derik said, “Lie down right here and get your scope on him. He is just over the top of the brush at 50 yards.”

Never got the shot off. Never got him in my scope. Never mind, he’s gone. “Darn it!” Again, Derik said, “Patience. He will stop and turn to look. Get ready.”

Lying down again, neck hurting, I got him in my scope—barely. Bang! Missed. That is when I finally said to a very patient, future son-in-law, friend, and guide, “I can’t make that shot



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B&C PRONGHORN TAKEN IN SWEETWATER COUNTY	
YEAR	TOTAL
2015	6
2014	5
2013	3
2012	2
2011	8
2010	9
2009	16
2008	6
2007	6
2006	3
2005	6

lying down. I will need to use your spotting scope tripod in order to have a chance.” He simply said, “Okay,” and got back to work.

By now you have probably guessed that the goat made a beeline out of there and the chance of getting him got a lot harder. We still had pretty good daylight and enough time if we could track his whereabouts. We walked and glassed and glassed; walked, repeat. Time and time again we found pronghorn but not Big Daddy. Derik decided enough time had passed that we should backtrack to see if he had returned to where we first spotted him. Again, spotting scope out, a few goats glassed and...nothing. Nope, not him. This went on for a while.

Then I heard Derik say, “You have got to be kidding me. I think I have Big Daddy in my spotting scope, and I think he has us as well.”

Yep, sure enough, that’s him, and sure enough, he had backtracked. It’s a standoff, and the pronghorn had the

upper hand. And he knew it.

At that moment, my wife sent me a text message asking if we had harvested a big boy. I responded that I should have had him earlier, but now he has us pinned down, and there’s not much we can do about it. Being the rookie I am at big game hunting and not knowing how long the standoff was going to take told me a lot about Derik. He was not about to let the pronghorn win that battle. He said to me, “Some hunters would give up after just a few minutes, but I will stay here 20, 30 minutes or longer if I have to.”

We made our move, took the long walk around to get out of his sight and wind, got in position and started to glass. He must have seen us, because he was way up the hill, opposite of where he was when we made our move. The look on Derik’s face was priceless, and I knew what he was thinking. The wind is right and he is about to go over that hill. He did—and we did, as well. Almost eight miles of walking and not one cactus

had gotten me until that last jaunt up the hill—our last effort in getting what we thought was a Booner. Not wanting to tell Derik that I may have a slight problem, I sucked it up and made the effort to finish what he had started out to do, and that was to get me a shot at what we hoped was a records-book pronghorn. Once again he got us into position. The wind was right; the goat had no idea we were there. Bang! A 125-yard shot, and down Big Daddy went. Derik’s patience, knowledge of hunting, landscape and animal had paid off. Big Daddy’s official score is 85-2/8.

I survived the eight-mile walk, cactus attack, disappointment in the first missed shot, Derik’s relentless tracking and the 20 years I have on this guy. He did it. He got me a goat—a records-book pronghorn—a big boy. He got me Big Daddy. He got me the pronghorn that should have been his trophy had he drawn a tag. Big Daddy was smarter than I thought, but not as smart as Big D, Derik Chandler. ■

BELOW: The author took this pronghorn in Sweetwater County, Wyoming, in 2015. The pronghorn was scored by Official Measurer Brent Wilkes and scored 85-2/8 points. **RIGHT:** Guide, future son-in-law, and friend Derik Chandler with David’s buck.

