



# Destin

## Trophy Pronghorn

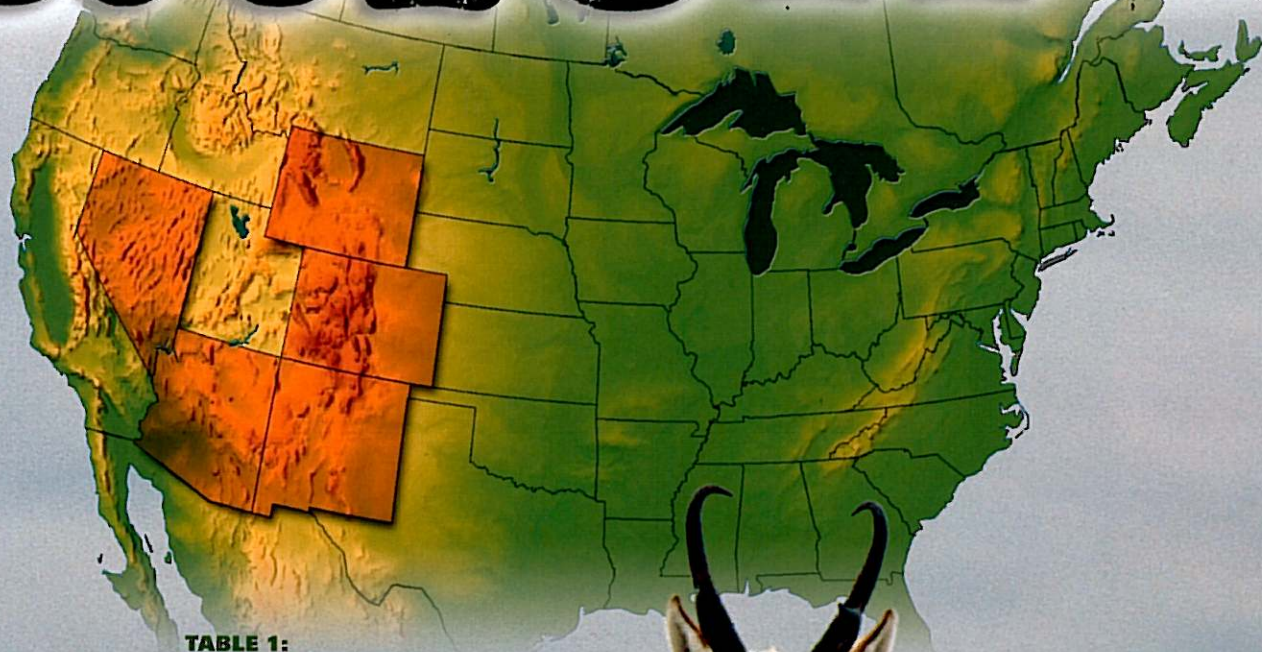
**Our Fascination with the West is Encapsulated  
by the Ultimate Every-man's Hunt**

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**By A.E. Walsh**

I live in central Virginia, a beautiful place but 2,853 miles and a world away from my Oregon home. The people of Virginia couldn't be nicer, and the sportsmen of the area are tickled with whitetails, turkeys, and largemouth bass in every large puddle. But I miss the open country and the accompanying thrill of a spot-and-stalk hunt; I miss the thick smell of sagebrush and the grit in my teeth after a day spent bumping along a high-desert two-track. I long for mule deer and elk, sage hens and jack rabbits, and even the adrenaline of bumping into a diamondback at the worst possible time. While it's true the sun rises and falls in the same manner the world over, there is an undeniable romance when the skyline is cluttered with the purple-green of sage brush and cacti. The West is my home at heart, regardless of my current address.

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**TABLE 1:  
TOP FIVE PRONGHORN STATES  
(1995-2006)**

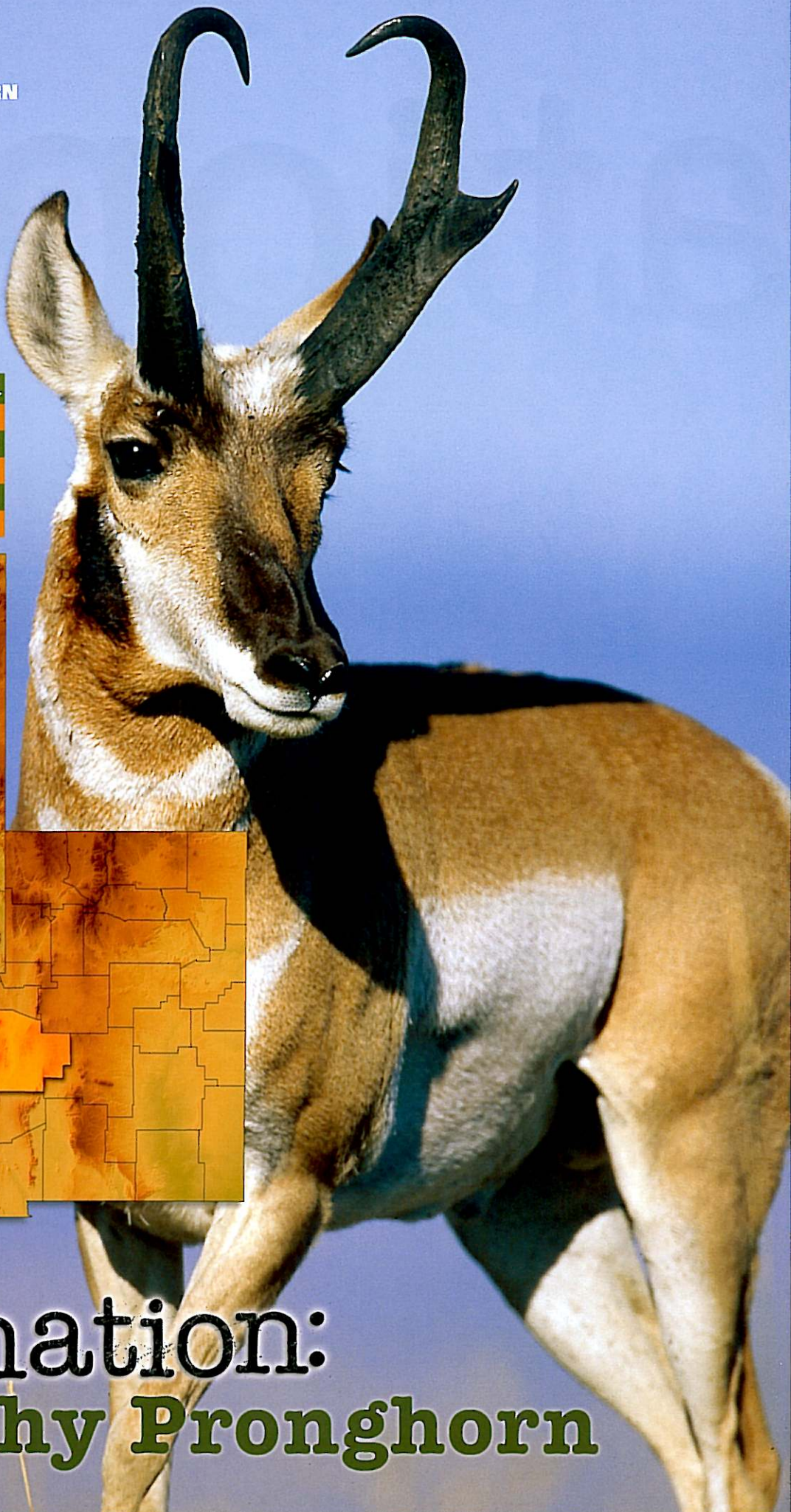
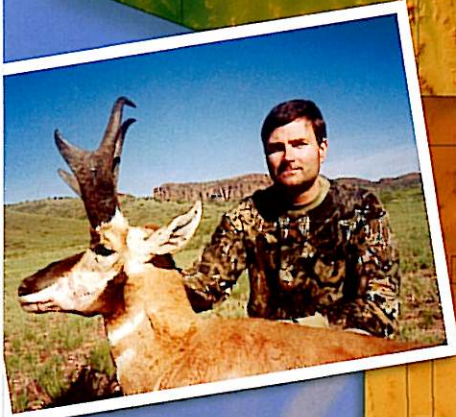
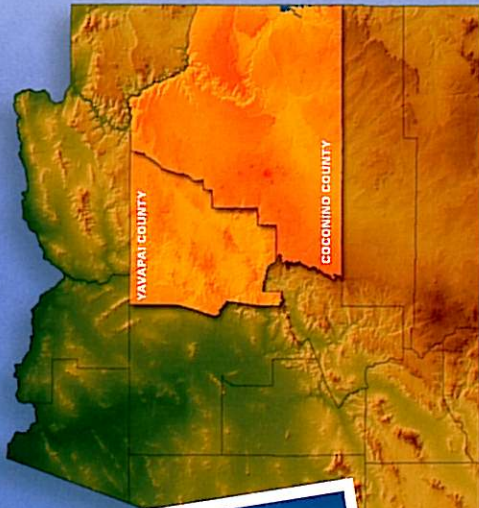
RANK	STATE/ PROVINCE	TOTAL ENTRIES
1	Wyoming	233
2	New Mexico	221
3	Arizona	97
4	Nevada	88
5	Colorado	45



**TABLE 2: TOP 5 PRONGHORN COUNTIES (1995-2006)**

The county with the single highest contribution to the records books is New Mexico's Socorro County (74 entries). One example of the type of trophy this area produces is R. Steve Bass's pronghorn pictured below. The buck, which scores 92-6/8 points, was taken in 1999. According to Trophy Search, Arizona has two counties that, when combined, equal the quantity found in Socorro County.

RANK	STATE	COUNTY	TOTAL
1	NM	Socorro County	74
2	WY	Carbon County	67
3	AZ	Yavapai County	39
4	NV	Washoe County	38
5	AZ	Coconino County	36



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I'm not alone in my fascination with the wide-open spaces of the prairie and desert. While most of us live stacked atop each other like cordwood, it's coded in our DNA to roam and explore. The adage of grass always being greener on the other side is sometimes true, but certainly not in the literal sense of the desert lands of our continent. There is a strange beauty in the stark high desert and one need not look much further than the oddity commonly known as the pronghorn antelope for confirmation.

Perhaps not the hunter's icon of the West like the wide-racked mule deer or a six-point bull standing in a steaming wallow, the pronghorn antelope is every bit the essence of our American West. A species on an island, *Antilocapra americana* is a survivor of ancients long since past. For taxonomical purposes, what we call the pronghorn is more closely related to the sheep, cow and/or goat, depending on which way the examination is conducted. Defying definition for centuries, the pronghorn antelope is a misnomer to anthropologists and biologists, but a prized quarry for those who pursue.

And while limited-entry permits for deer and elk are often hard to come by, pronghorn tags are relatively easy to procure and success rates can be wildly higher than those of other western species. True, the areas that produce the largest horned specimens will offer lottery-drawing opportunities to hunt. However, there are thousands of tags available over the counter or with an easy draw, and better yet, countless acres of public and publicly available land on which to hunt them. The pronghorn offers the access and ubiquity to earn it serious consideration as the most exotic hunt available to every man today.

### Where the Deer and the Pronghorn Play

Let me begin with the assertion that every pronghorn is a trophy pronghorn. Hunting the pronghorn is fodder for a lifetime of campfire stories.

Whereas it was once estimated that the Lewis and Clark expedition traveled among as many as 35 million pronghorns, market hunting dropped their numbers to less than 15,000 in the mid-1800s. Today, sustained and huntable herds cover the prairie from the Great Plains westward, reaching from Saskatchewan to Mexico. And all along the way, there are monsters mixed with the masses.

The southwest gets most of the deserved notoriety for trophy-class prong-

horns, especially New Mexico, Arizona, and Nevada. Over the last 10 years these three states have qualified more than 400 entries to the Boone and Crockett Club's records book. Four of the top five entries hail from Arizona, including the 95-inch co-World's Records of David Meyer and Dylan Woods. Further, of the top 25 scoring pronghorn taken in the last 10 years, eight came from the northwest corner of Arizona to include Mohave, Yavapai, and Coconino Counties. New Mexico contributes seven entries over the same period and Nevada, two.

However, the top state for total entries is Wyoming with 233 qualifiers over

the last 10 years, including three in the top 25. Historically, Wyoming has always been the state for trophy-class pronghorn: Reaching back through Boone and Crockett Club's Trophy Search database to 1830, Wyoming has 750 entries in the books, almost double second-place New Mexico's 434. Current hot spots include the counties within the Big Horn Basin, as well as the stretch along I-80 between Green River and Rawlins. Also consider Albany County north of Laramie.

While these are excellent destinations and your odds of pulling a monster from their ranks are certainly heightened,

**THE  
MIGRATION  
HAS BEGUN**

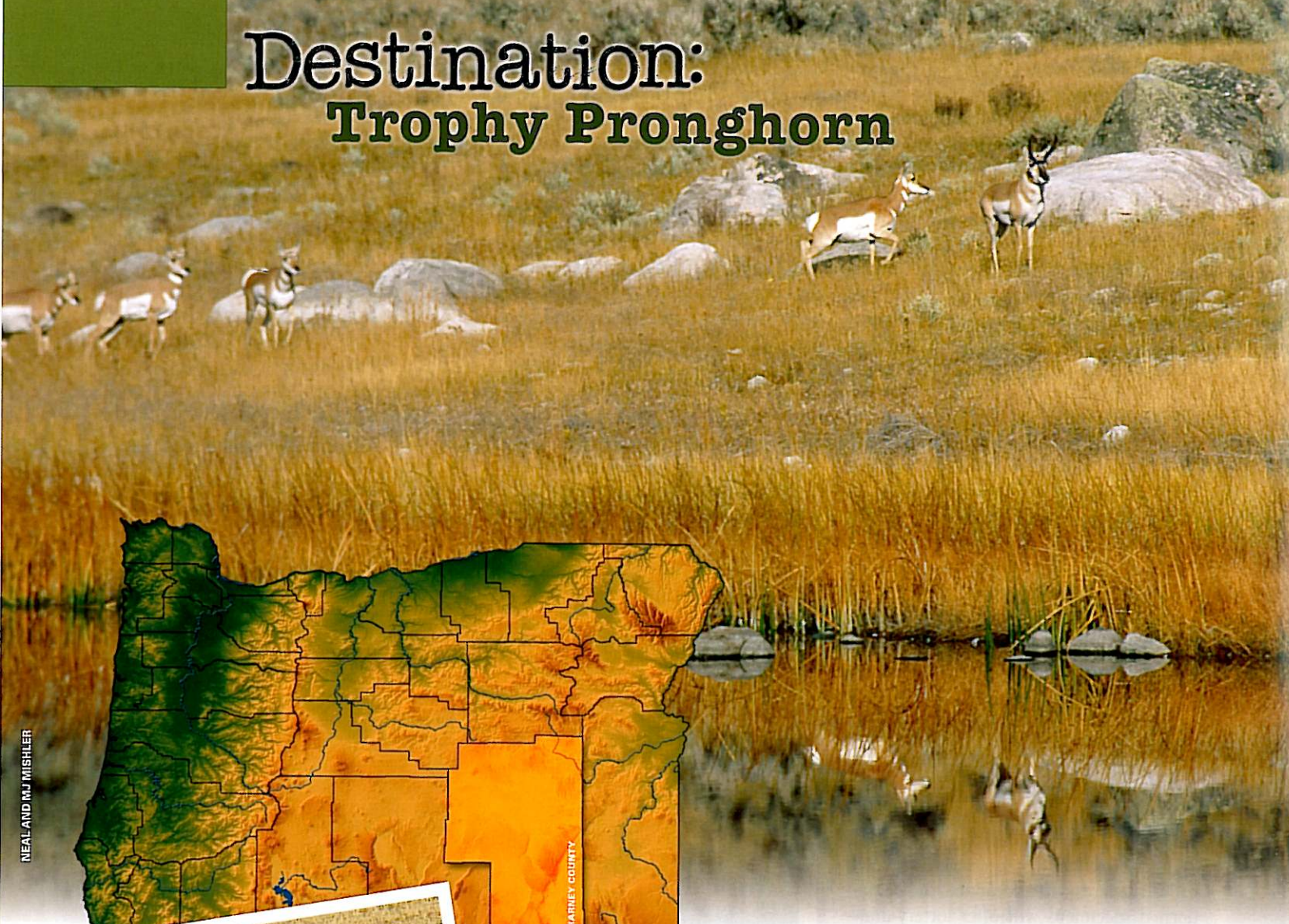
**ALL FLYWAYS LEAD TO  
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DUCK COMMANDER

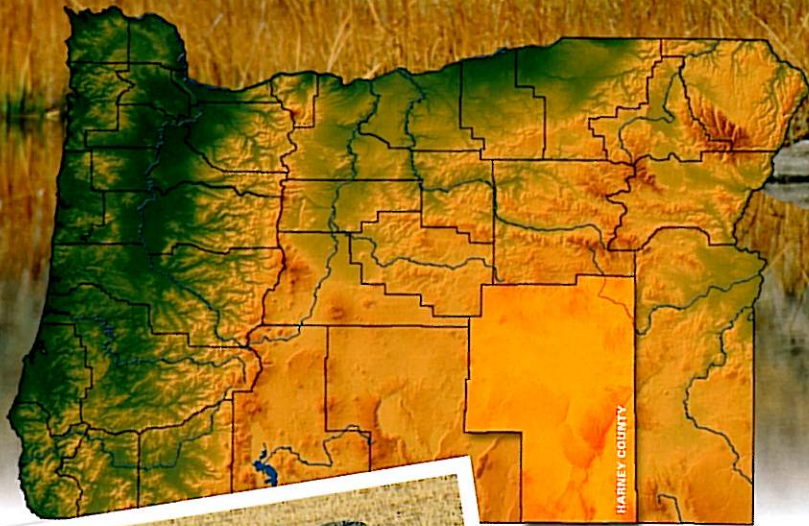
ADVANTAGE  
MAX-4

The advertisement features a collage of images. At the top left, a close-up of a man's face with a beard and a pipe. Below this, a group of five hunters in camouflage gear standing in a field. The background is a warm, orange-toned landscape with silhouettes of trees and birds in flight. The text is overlaid in a bold, white, sans-serif font with black outlines. At the bottom, there is a circular logo with a duck and the text 'DUCK COMMANDER' and a small 'ADVANTAGE MAX-4' logo in the bottom right corner.

# Destination: Trophy Pronghorn



NEAL AND M.J. WISHLER



HARNEY COUNTY

there are plenty of trophy-class pronghorns sprinkled throughout the entirety of its home range.

Take, for example, the bucks of Francis Dobitz (90-4/8 points) and Randy Grover (90-2/8 points). Less than five inches off the World's Record, Dobitz's North Dakota and Grover's Idaho goats come from states in the bottom third of trophy production. Oregon, the seventh-ranked producer over the last 10 years has two top-ten entries: Sam Barry at 92-6/8 points (7) and Rick Ullery at 91-4/8 points (8).

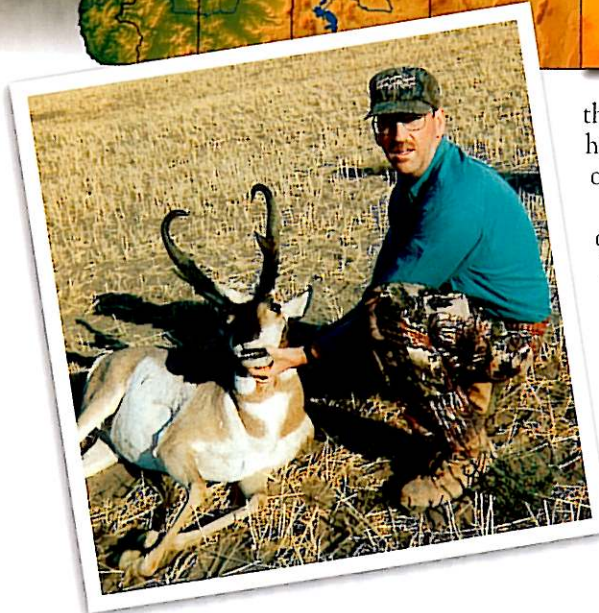
Rick Ullery has also taken the Number 11 prairie goat (91 points) in another "sleeper" state, Utah.

Finding the best place to chase pronghorns begins with the state wildlife agencies. For first-timers, a good jumping-off point is Wyoming, due to tremendous numbers of pronghorn, easy access to tags (including thousands of leftover tags available after the lottery draw) and plentiful lands on which to hunt. Montana and east-

ern Colorado also offer good introductions. Obtain a copy of the current year's hunting synopsis and pay particular attention to the unit maps contained therein. Don't overlook the units with easy-to-obtain permits; as demonstrated above, just about anywhere there are pronghorn, there are good pronghorn.

Once you've determined a destination, contact the public-land agencies in the area, such as the Bureau of Land Management or National Forest Service. Not only can they point you in the direction of the goats, but they may also be able to put you in contact with local ranchers who are eager to host responsible hunters. Unlike most other game in the West, public land does not spell diminishing returns for antelope.

The techniques employed by pronghorn hunters are varied and easily adapted to the hunter's preference and ability. While the hunt is ideal for the classic spot-and-stalk, success can be equally high for hunters willing to sit out a hot summer day in a ground blind.



There are plenty of trophy-class pronghorns throughout the west — not just in the two hot spots of New Mexico and Arizona. Pictured here is Sam Barry with his buck scoring 92-6/8 points. It was taken in Oregon's Harney County in 2000.

Although the pronghorns' sharp eyesight can get you busted at a distance of miles rather than yards, terrain variations and sparse vegetation can often get you within shooting range. To tip the odds in your favor as much as possible, good, light-colored camouflage is a must. If it's a one-time trip out West and you don't want to spring for camo designed to conceal in sagebrush, consider a wetlands pattern; the large print and light colors will work just fine in the desert. Also matte-finished rifles and scopes are essential even if it means a temporary wrap of camouflage tape. (Think sniper rifle.)

To locate pronghorns you'll need to travel. Depending on the regulations and limitations of an area, that most likely means lots of walking and frequent glassing. Keep in mind that every depression in the terrain can hold goats, and often land that appears flat at a distance is full of holes that hold goats. Get out and spend the time walking for best results.

Stand hunters have a couple of options, the most obvious and popular is sitting on a water hole. (In some states hunting within a certain distance of water is illegal, so carefully read the regulations.) When hunting water, pop-up blinds offer portability and some protection from the

often oppressive desert heat, but natural blinds such as windmills, brushy fence lines, old homesteads and farm implements can come in handy.

Another option for setting up on pronghorn is the fence crossing. Because pronghorn would rather set themselves on fire than jump a fence, look for well-worn paths under the bottom strand of wire fencing. Believe me, you'll know it when you find the local crossing point; all the goats within miles are sliding their bellies under the wire, and the divot will be noticeable.

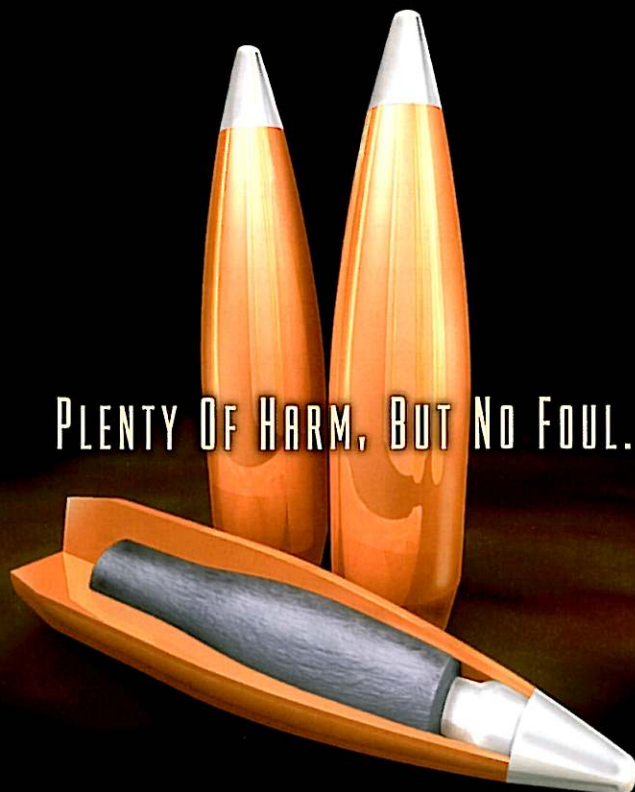
Regardless of your method, hunting pronghorns without good optics is like marrying on a blind date. Under the best of conditions, you may see a goat for the first time at more than a mile away. Without quality glass you'll get nothing more than a tawny body and the flash of his white rump as you struggle to get close enough for a decent look. Since bucks and does both sport horns, it's a waste of precious hunting time and considerable energy to chase a herd only to discover a cluster of short-horned does. Beg or borrow good glass if you don't own them, but don't go with less than the best you can get your hands on.

The equipment requirements for a pronghorn hunt are minimal and costs are

very low compared to other Western hunting opportunities. Tags and licenses will generally run the non-resident hunter between \$200 and \$300, a bargain especially considering a pronghorn hunt is a great do-it-yourselfer. While the price of a fully guided hunt will vary widely depending on the area and amenities, public-lands campgrounds or even small mom-and-pop hotels are excellent ways to keep your costs down. Besides food and lodging, the only other real expense will be the cost of transportation. Those with a four-wheel-drive pickup truck should consider driving to their destination, as you'll need a vehicle to get in and out of your hunting area, and most hunters are within a couple of leisurely days drive from all the key locales.

Looking to share your costs? Many states allow party applications for pronghorn. A comfortable pronghorn hunt can easily be had for less than the cost of most guided whitetail hunts anywhere in the country.

For those penned up in the metropolitan life, fighting your way upstream at the end of each day only to realize you can shake your neighbor's hand without leaving your home, the pronghorn is your escape... and your best indoctrination into the experience of Western hunting. ■



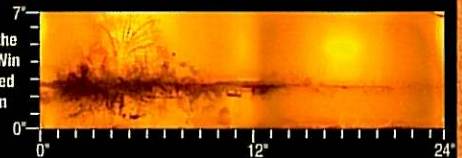
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