

A Little Slice of Texas Heaven

By Susan Reneau – B&C Associate

The narrow-necked pronghorn buck grazed nonchalantly as his harem of 20 does stood nearby, munching scraps of sagebrush and an occasional blade of yellow angular grass. I crouched behind a rock outcropping overlooking the herd that stood about a half mile from my guide, Dan McBride, and me. We glassed the horizon and whispered our debate as to how to best make a successful stalk across the barren landscape of southwest Texas.

For three days, Dan, my husband Jack, and I had teamed up to spot and glass various pods of pronghorn on an open-range ranch Dan leases each hunting season. For three days we saw a variety of respectable bucks, but this buck was different. Dan was definitely excited as he checked and rechecked the buck from a distance and talked excitedly about this being one of the largest bucks he had ever seen on the ranch in his years of hunting the area. The buck's horns and prongs were so substantial that his body looked disproportionately small.

I wasn't concerned if I found a trophy buck because for me the time spent with Dan, and his wife Linda, and Jack near El Paso was reward enough. I met Linda while researching my book, titled, *Thrill of the Chase: Women and Their North American Big Game Trophies*. Linda has the distinction of collecting five Boone and Crockett

pronghorn bucks, while Dan has four in the records book. Linda's lifetime of hunting successes are featured in the book and from our interviews, a friendship grew. What a surprise and honor when Dan and Linda asked Jack and me to join them in early October 2002 to share their favorite hunting spots. Pronghorn hunting is my favorite fall pastime, so when Dan and Linda invited us to hunt with them, I jumped at the chance, although I was a bit intimidated by Linda's hunting skills.

It was getting late and the shadows were getting longer as Dan and I planned our stalk. If I was to collect my buck, it was now. Jack decided to stay behind and watch the events unfold with his binoculars.

My most accurate shooting distance is less than 200 yards, and I told Dan my favorite part of pronghorn hunting was trying to get as close to the animal as possible without spooking it. I said I wanted to get to within 50 yards of the buck, if possible, and so the challenge was made and off we went. My goal for every animal I hunt is to take it with one fatal shot.

Dan suggested we follow the creeping evening shadows as they flowed over the rocks and yucca plants on

this moon-like landscape. We bent in half and slipped over the hardened dirt to the next yucca plant that in this part of Texas grow as tall as trees. Dan led me closer and closer to the unsuspecting buck. We both kept close watch over the alert does that walked ahead of the buck in the brush. Each time we reached a new yucca, I caught my breath and peeked from behind the plant for a better look at the quarry. Throughout the stalk I imagined myself as a yucca and made certain I was bent so low that even if the pronghorn saw me hopefully they would not recognize me as human.

The buck remained calm and unsuspecting but one edgy doe periodically raised her head and looked in our direction, not knowing what she feared but knowing something was out there that alarmed her. We froze each time until her head bent to graze and off we would scoot until finally we were within 50 yards of the herd that had walked behind a series of low bushes. That was my cue to prepare for a shot. One, two, three, and more does lazily walked from behind a clump of brush and the buck remained far back from them, watching their every move.

Dan handed me shooting sticks, and I plunked myself down on the hard dirt with legs crossed. I lined up the crosshairs of my Leupold 2x9 variable on the heart-lung area of the buck that had stepped from behind the last bush, took one deep breath, held it, and slowly pulled the trigger of my .270 Browning A-bolt. The shot exploded with a sharp crack and the 150-grain bullet hit its mark. The shot was fatal but a second shot sped the process.

I jumped up and cried and hugged Dan and cried some more, not believing that after a half-mile stalk through dirt and yucca and shadows this glorious animal was mine. I thanked God for creating such a beautiful creature. By the time we field dressed it, the shadows had completely enveloped the terrain so the headlights on Jack's approaching Jeep provided much needed light.

Dan knew immediately that the buck was Boone and Crockett but I had my doubts. Jack did a rough green score of the horns and prongs back at camp and gave the buck a score of a little over 81 points, which was big enough to make the Awards book if the horns didn't shrink too much during the 60-day drying period.

The buck had a final score of 80-6/8 points, a score that qualifies it for the 25th Awards Program. No matter the size, my buck from Texas was a little slice of heaven in memories. The vibrant orange, red, and pink sunsets, and the outlines of towering yucca plants, will be etched in my mind forever whenever I look upon this buck that Dan mounted for me (he is also an award-winning taxidermist). Friendships made and a wild pronghorn collected are reasons why I hunt. ■

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Susan Reneau with her pronghorn scoring 80-6/8 points.

The 30-Point Buck

By Larry Reece – B&C Associate

Being a land surveyor by profession, I am able to see a lot of game in my native Mississippi. During the past five years, I had done a lot of work for a private landowner in Madison County. He had several good places to hunt on his property and after persistent inquiries, he agreed to let me lease a 240-acre pasture that had been planted in pines about a year prior. My brother, Randy, and I simply called this place “Madison,” because it is the only land we lease in Madison County.

In early December the landowner called me and said that he had seen a whitetail in our hunting area that had a tremendous spread, probably between 24 and 26 inches. He said the rack had seven points, no brow tines, was not all that pretty, but the spread was massive. As soon as the landowner hung up, I called my brother Randy at the Federal Correctional Institute in Yazoo City (he works there, he doesn't reside there) and told him about the deer.

We decided to hunt that afternoon and picked out stands where we thought we might see the deer the landowner had described. About 10 minutes before the end of legal shooting time, I saw a buck at the far

I had a good prop on the stand and carefully placed the crosshairs of my gun on his chest. I squeezed off the shot. After the smoke lifted, I saw the deer's white belly on the ground with his legs pointed toward me. I let out a big sigh of relief and thought, “I got him!” This elation lasted only briefly, however, because the deer began moving around, trying to get his feet under him. I am all too familiar with that action. I knew that if he was able to get his feet under him, he might just get away. I hurriedly tried to reload but before I finished, he got on his feet and took off through small, thick pines. I mentally marked his path, and listened for the death crash that never came.

From his stand, Randy had seen the flash when my muzzleloader went off and he arrived at my stand about 20 minutes later. We found the spot where the buck had dropped and found a pool of blood. We trailed the blood for a hundred yards or so through the pines before it trickled down to nothing. We then did what a lot of people tracking a deer do from the beginning—we looked in the direction we thought the deer had traveled. But a sick feeling came over me. My brother and I have trailed enough wounded deer to know that when the blood trail runs out, so do most of your chances of finding the deer, even if they are dead.

I didn't think the animal had stumbled to the ground—I was sure the force of the bullet had knocked the buck off of his feet. Nevertheless, we did not find the deer that night. The next day I made a thorough search of the area but did not succeed in locating the deer. I tried contacting a friend who had a tracking dog, but he was hunting and could not be reached.

During the days that followed, Randy and I continued to hunt the Madison area fairly intensively. I knew that the buck I had wounded was not the deer that the landowner had described—that “26-incher” the landowner had spotted earlier was still at large. During our outings, we kept our eye out for buzzards and listened for coyotes or dogs in the hopes that they might lead us to the wounded deer.

Nine days later, while hunting Madison, I heard Randy take a single shot. When we met at the trucks, Randy said he had killed an 11-point whitetail with a 17” spread—but that was not the real news. The real news was that he had found my deer! Randy told me that in retrieving his deer, he had come upon a small pond in an obscured area. He looked in the pond and discovered the partly submerged body of a deer whose head was stuck underwater. Randy pulled the head out of the pond and stared in amazement at the rack.

When Randy showed me my long-lost whitetail, I finally got to do what I had been wanting to do ever since the shot, which was to look long and hard at the antlers. The day of our encounter, the buck had heard my grunt call and came without hesitation to whip whatever deer was trying to challenge him. After examining his monstrous rack, it was evident that he could have probably whipped them all. These days, when I tell someone about this buck, I begin by asking them, “Do you remember the song about the 30-point buck? Well, I got him.” ■



Larry Reece with his non-typical whitetail deer scoring 207-3/8 points.

end of a 40-foot wide, mowed power line. By the time I got my muzzleloader up and looked through the scope, all I saw was a rack disappearing into some weeds. If the buck kept moving the way he was headed, I knew I would lose sight of him forever.

I had a grunt call strung around my neck and although I have never used one much, I had to do something, so I picked up the grunt call and made two small “beeap, beeaps” on it. When I put the grunt call down and picked up the muzzleloader, I saw a deer come trotting down the middle of the lane toward me and stop about 80 yards away, looking at me, or so it seemed. I found him in the scope, and saw a rack that was wide, unbalanced, and full of points.

A Family Affair

By Susan Tuttle – B&C Associate

My family and I live in Utah, only about thirty minutes from the unit where I had drawn a pronghorn tag. Throughout the summer, we spent a lot of time scouting for pronghorn, combining this with picnics and family adventures with our three young children. By the time hunting season approached, I had found two good bucks in my unit and kept a close eye on them as well as trying to find any other bucks that would possibly score 80 points or higher. I also practiced shooting, and by the end, I was pretty confident I could hit what I was aiming at—but little did I know what a rush of adrenaline can do to a person.

Two days before the hunt was to begin, my husband, Brent, happened to be working in an area we hadn't spent too much time scouting, and when he got home that evening he said that our plans had changed. On his way home, he had found two huge bucks about a mile from each other. Both were as good, if not better, than the ones we had already decided to hunt, and they were in an area that probably would not receive much



Susan took her pronghorn scoring 83 points in the desert terrain of Utah.

hunting pressure. Our new plan was laid out in detail that night.

Opening morning was picture perfect with the sunrise, the scenery and a small group of pronghorn feeding about 300 yards away. With the sunrise we gained enough light to determine that the better of the two bucks was right where we wanted him. He had six does with him and a younger buck that he was having a heck of a time trying to keep away from the does. He would chase the smaller buck for about 400 yards at a full throttle, then trot back to the herd with the younger buck trailing behind him by about 100 yards.

This scenario continued for about 20 minutes, which gave me plenty of time to look him over. The buck

had height, mass, and great prongs, and I decided that he was exactly what I wanted. I chambered a round in my Ruger 7mm and put the crosshairs on the huge buck. After I shot, my first thoughts were that another big buck had appeared . . . but then I heard Brent's brother say, "You missed," and my stomach went into my throat.

Amazingly, the buck gave me a second chance. He was more interested in running off the younger buck than following his does, which were quickly exiting the area. As the does bounded off, he chased the smaller buck back to a spot within shooting range. Brent said to me, "Calm down, and when he stops, take him." When the buck stopped to look for his does, I put the crosshairs right on him, or so I thought, and pulled the trigger. Again, I heard Brent's brother say, "You missed," but I already knew the outcome of my shot when I saw that gorgeous buck bound off in the direction his does.

Not knowing exactly where the big buck would end up, we debated whether to go after him or try to find the second buck that was in the area. We decided that we would probably not find a better buck than this one so the hike began. As we trailed after the pronghorn herd, I wondered how a desert that looked so flat could have so many hidden canyons. About two hours later, we spotted the band of pronghorn way out in front of us. We figured that if we hurried and took a direct bearing to try to cut them off, we might be able to get ahead of them.

I found that trying to keep up with pronghorn and long-legged men can really be a challenge. But between trotting and telling the guys to slow down, I made it to where I might get a shot. I set up the shooting sticks and waited. It wasn't long before a doe showed up at the top of the hill above us, but she spotted us as soon as we saw her. Her curiosity held her for a few moments, but we could tell that she was getting ready to bolt and alert the others. My only choice for a shot was to get on top of the hill, about 50 yards above us. I hoped the buck would be following at the rear of the herd so he would not know exactly what was happening for a few seconds.

Brent and I dashed to the crest of the ridge in time to see the lead doe trot back to the rest of the herd. The buck was the last one in the line, and Brent said to take him as soon as he turned broadside. The buck only turned for a split second, but it was enough time for me to take the shot. This time there was no doubt as to whether I missed or not—the buck instantly dropped to the ground.

When Brent's brother caught up to us, he joked, "It's about time." However, for me, the time had been just about perfect. What a morning! After the celebrating was done we quartered and caped the buck then started on the long trek back to the truck. I thanked the men involved for having patience with me—a little adrenaline can really screw up a good shot, but I guess that is what makes hunting so exciting. The buck was officially scored at 83 points, making it eligible for the Boone and Crockett Club's 25th Awards Program. By the way, this was my first pronghorn and it is bigger than anything that any of the men had ever taken. "YES!!!" ■