



The California heat, wildfires and wild horses and predators were all working against Dave on his quest to hunt pronghorn in his home state.



# STRIKING GOLD IN CALIFORNIA

Wyoming, Arizona, and New Mexico come into most hunters' minds when going after pronghorn—not California. Yet I have been applying for a pronghorn tag there for 18 years, and in 2020 I had a gut feeling that it was my year to hunt pronghorn in my home state.

When it was time for the draw results to come out in late June, I checked the fish and game's website hourly for a couple days. Then, finally, I saw that magic word: Successful!

It was a busy time for my family. My wife and I were trying to sell our home and move into a new one. My buddy Randy and I were getting ready for a New Mexico pronghorn hunt the weekend prior to the California hunt. A California "goat" scouting trip wasn't in the cards since it was a six-hour drive to our hunting spot.

I had talked to a few people who had hunted the area before me, including Dante, a good buddy of mine who lives just south of the unit. Dante, Randy, and I gathered up all of our info and decided to head up the Thursday before the season started. Scouting the area was tough! The temperature was hot, and wildfires burned all around us. Worst of all, the abundance of wild horses and predators made it tough to locate many pronghorn. We did spot three different bucks, one of

which we needed a better look at on opening morning.

We did find that buck opening morning, but after studying him for a while, I decided I would hold off and try to find a bigger one because we were only 30 minutes into the season. We put many miles on Dante's side-by-side, which we named the "Goat Getter" as we glassed every sage flat in the area. We didn't see another pronghorn until 4:30 that afternoon Randy was able to make a good shot on a nice buck.

The following day we were in the same area looking for the buck we had spotted on opening morning. He was nowhere to be found. Sunday was the same as opening day—lots of miles put on the Goat Getter and a lot of hours behind binoculars and spotting scopes. By the afternoon, though, our luck started to change, and we started to see more pronghorn.

A group of about 25 fed out onto a flat that gave us a good look, but there wasn't a buck anywhere with them. Fifteen minutes later Dante spotted two more goats. I played cat and mouse with them looking to see if there was a buck. After sneaking into 140 yards, I found a buck. He wasn't big, but he was looking good enough for me since I have only killed one pronghorn before. I waited for a clear shot. The buck never presented one, then it spooked and took off across the sage flat out of range. As I was walking back to Dante and Randy, all I wanted to do was get some food, regroup and give it one last go in the morning. When I found the boys, Dante said he had a spot he wanted to go check out.

"There's some pronghorn under that tree," said Randy excitedly as we came over a little rise. They were in the

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.

## BEYOND THE SCORE

David Hamer  
Photos Courtesy of Author

shade so we couldn't tell if there was a buck with them. "There's a buck," said Randy as they moved out from under the tree. I got into position for a shot as Randy called the yardage. I kept telling myself to be calm and take a good shot.

For some reason the group of pronghorn started coming toward us. Randy told me to get ready. "They're at 440, 380, 260," Randy said. The last number I heard was 210 when the rifle went boom. Pronghorn down! I never really looked closely at the horns before pulling the trigger. I just knew it was a buck, and that I was going to

take him. I didn't realize what I really had until we walked up on him.

"Dave, you just got yourself a book buck," said Randy. After I called my wife, we took a bunch of pictures, field-dressed the buck and loaded it on the Goat Getter to head home.

I put a tape to him and came up with a green score of 84-6/8. He has 17-inch long horns, 6-4/8-inch bases and 6-inch prongs. After waiting the 60-day drying period it was scored by an Official Measurer at 83-6/8 points. I want to thank Randy and Dante. Without you guys, this would have never happened. ■



After many hours in the 'Goat Getter' (top right) David finally found his book buck, scoring 83-6/8 points. BELOW: Dave (left) with his hunting buddies, Dante Callegari (center), and Randy Shipman (right).



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