



PRONGHORN

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My First Antelope Hunt

By Chris Vassel

At last it was July and the word came that after seven straight years of applying for an antelope permit, I was finally drawn in unit 2c. Not my first choice but I was very happy none the less. Being married to a hunting guide and outfitter meant preparation was the first priority. My husband John and I both knew how hard an antelope tag is to get. We wanted to make sure every detail was taken care of for an enjoyable and successful hunt. Preparation many times is the key to making such dreams come true.

We made a plan to scout every other weekend until the season came, and a checklist of other important items. One item was what rifle I would use? My older .308 had been jamming some and only had open sights. A call went out to Joe Machac a good friend and the best gunsmith in town. He assured us he could have my rifle ready to go before my hunt. When we dropped it off to him I brought to his attention of a special need I had in the scope department, you see I shoot right handed but have a false right eye so I have to use my left eye. He knew of an offset scope mount that would allow for just that type of set up.

Next on the agenda was getting to know the unit. We had driven by it many times but had never hunted there. We racked up thousands of miles during our scouting trips. It is more than 200 miles one way from our home in the valley. Our first trip was a real eye opener. Much of this unit is covered by private land. As we drove around different areas and in an out of developments, we were indeed seeing antelope but much to close to homes to hunt. So we began studying all the maps of the unit to find open public lands and the roads that would take us there. It was lush green from all the summer rains; the grass was at least two feet tall in many places and the ground very moist and muddy. Some of the roads on the map were either grown over or gone, so we came to many dead-ends. But after a few weekends we had them pretty well figured out.

While we were driving around learning the unit and the roads a very important aspect of our scouting was also taking place. This was our spotting of antelope, we began marking the maps with the letter "A" everywhere we saw a buck. Also we decided to nickname the larger ones so we could map their territories. This was so much fun! I love viewing wildlife. We spent countless hours enjoying these



Chris Vassel, September 1999

great creatures and their habits. Soon we knew the territories of 3 very nice bucks. Mr. Big was my 1st choice, very close to 20" with heavy bases. Next was Hugo who we figured to be around 18" also with good mass. Finally there was Mr. Heart who didn't have quite the length or thickness as the others but would still push 17" and who's horns spread out and then curved back in at the top to make a beautiful heart shape.

Now with the hunt just a few more weeks away I picked up my rifle to "zero it in" and to get used to the new scope set up. It worked fantastic and I was very comfortable with the groups I was shooting. The next ten days or so flew right by.

It was now the morning before the season and we were off to find Mr. Big. He was right where we expected him to be, which was a relief. We watched him and his does for awhile, soon a smaller satellite buck wandered into his territory and the race was on. He ran the smaller buck more than a mile before he stopped his pursuit. Mr. Big then returned to his harem and laid down to rest. We decided that we should go look-up Hugo. He too was in his normal hangout. After a short while of watching and feeling comfortable of his whereabouts, we decided we should go keep a close eye on Mr. Big. When we returned to his area we couldn't locate him and the sun was marching quickly to the west. Soon we spotted some does and figured they

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*Thank You for your Contributions
and Your Support! - AAF*

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I guess it's time for a little follow-up on some of the issues I discussed in the last issue.

A workshop to kick off development of a statewide operational plan for antelope was held in May at the Arizona Game and Fish Department's main office in Phoenix. Hosted by Jim DeVos of the department's research branch, the workshop was designed to solicit inputs from land management agencies, conservation groups and others on why antelope herds are declining in the state and what can be done to reverse that trend. We've received the initial report, summarizing the ideas discussed at the workshop. An operational plan is still a long ways off, but a lot of good ideas were aired during the session, and most participants, myself included, felt the process is off to a good start.

In early August, we met with Arizona Game and Fish Department Director Duane Shroufe and a number of other department personnel to air our concerns about the expected loss to development of a large portion of the antelope habitat in the Prescott - Chino Valley area. We were pleased to learn that the department, Eric Gardner from the Region III office in particular, already has a draft plan outlining where the antelope are and who owns the land they live on. The tough part, of course, will be figuring out a way to keep some of that habitat from being developed to the point that it can no longer support an antelope herd. Habitat loss is likely to be substantial over the next several years, although we're satisfied that the department will do what it can to save as much as possible. We'll be working with them to help out as much as we can.

Another meeting we participated in during the month of August was the second of, hopefully, a continuing series of meetings on the Anderson Mesa issue. This herd continues to decline despite a number of projects that have taken place to turn the situation around. Obviously, more aggressive action will be needed to bring the herd back, but figuring out what that action should be and getting the various affected parties to agree on it is not going to be easy. At this point, there is along way to go. We'll keep you posted on the situation as it develops.

Our work projects are coming along well. The White Mountain Grassland project in late July and the joint project with the Diablo Trust in early August were both productive and should provide long-term benefits for the antelope in their respective areas. Next up is the fall project at Horseshoe Ranch in unit 21, tentatively scheduled to take place in November. Next year promises to be even busier. We have lined up projects at Fort Huachuca, the Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge, and Horseshoe Ranch in the spring, and we'll have several more in the summer. Please try to make one or more of them; you'll have a great time, and we can use your help.

Warren Leek

Pronghorn is a quarterly newsletter for the members of AAF. Letters, comments, news items, articles, pictures and stories are all welcome and will be considered for publication.

Address all such items to: Rick Long, at Pronghorn editor, PO Drawer 15501, Phoenix, AZ 85060. Deadlines April 15, July 15, October 15, January 15.

THE ARIZONA SPECIAL ANTELOPE TAG PROGRAM UPDATE

In the last issue of the Pronghorn, we gave you an overview of the special tag fund projects approved in the summer of 2000 for the current year. In August of this year, representatives of the Foundation met with the Arizona Game and Fish Department to get a report on those projects and review the project proposals for the coming year. The two special tags that were auctioned this spring generated a total of \$74,000, and with carryover from previous years, something in the neighborhood of \$115,000 was available for antelope projects in the coming year.

One of the projects approved last year - unit I 0 predator management - was unable to get the necessary clearances and was cancelled. Two others - the Sinks/Sterling burn in unit 6B and the Goodwin Mesa burn in unit 18B - are still awaiting the necessary environmental clearances but are scheduled to go forward. All the other projects that we approved have either been accomplished or will be in the very near future.

Here is a listing of the special tag fund projects approved for the upcoming year:

Ellsworth trick tank construction and reconstruction of Cottonwood trick tank. This project will provide two reliable water sources in a portion of game management unit -@IC that has a good population of resident pronghorns and also has been identified as critical winter range.

South Pasture tree shearing. Mechanical shears, sometimes known as an agra-axe (see pictures in the last issue), will be used to clear encroaching brush from approximately 300 acres in unit 3A. Mechanical shears offer a significant advantage over past methods of brush clearing because they don't disturb the soil in the area being treated to any significant extent. This makes getting the necessary environmental clearances, especially the archeological clearances, much easier to obtain.

Bar-T-Bar soil stabilization project. In this project, dead junipers from a recent 4,000 acre chaining will be moved into a drainage to act as check dams. In addition to controlling erosion, vegetation will grow in the sediment that builds up behind the check dams. The project will take place on private and state lands of the Bar-T-Bar Ranch in unit 5B.

Brannigan Flat vicinity grassland restoration. This project will involve the use of mechanical shears to remove encroaching pine, pinyon, and juniper trees from approximately 390 acres of grasslands in the Brannigan Flat area of game management unit 7 West.

Highway 180 pronghorn crossing corridor. Pronghorns have traditionally used a onemile corridor on Highway 180 between Flagstaff and Valle to move between their summer and winter ranges. Babbitt Ranches has proposed doing a forage enhancement project in the area that will also facilitate movement through the corridor. About 1,200 acres recently invaded by pinyons and junipers will be treated with an agra-axe, creating a mosaic of treated and untreated areas.

Truxton Flat dam repairs. This project involves moving earth to reinforce the dams and deepen the basins of three earthen tanks in the northwestern portion of unit 18A. These tanks - Antelope, Cherokee, and Dead Cow - were all damaged by a summer thunderstorm that created extremely high runoff.

Huff grassland restoration. Another agra-axe project. In this case, pinyon and juniper will be removed from an area of roughly 500 acres of state land surrounding Huff Reservoir in unit 9. Two or three years after the project is completed, a prescribed burn will be done.

Perrin Pasture prescribed burn. This prescribed fire will be conducted in the Perrin Pasture area of the Kaibab National Forest in unit 9. The object of the burn is to open *up* the habitat and improve forage and visibility for pronghorns in the area.

Arizona Strip fence inventory. To accomplish this project, two summer interns will be hired to use GPS technology to map livestock fences in game management units 13A and 13B, noting which ones need modification to make them more antelope-friendly. Since antelope generally won't jump a fence, they need to slip underneath, and many livestock fences have barbed wire so close to the ground that the antelope can't get through. Ideally, the bottom strand should be 16" to 18" above the ground and it should be slick, rather than barbed, wire. Most of the land in the project area belongs to the Bureau of Land Management or the state. The plan calls for modification the following year of fences that don't meet wildlife standards.

Yellow Jacket solar well improvement. The Yellow Jacket well has been a critical water source for the Marlow antelope herd in unit 21 since it was installed in 1993. The well is currently inoperative because of a lightning strike. This project will replace the damaged well pump and solar panels, as well as increasing the capacity of the solar unit.

Davis Pasture water catchment. The herd of 30 or so prongboms in the portion of unit 34B just west of the Mustang Mountains doesn't have a reliable perennial water source because of the ranch management practice of draining waters to aid in the movement of livestock. This project will provide a year-round water source with a livestock enclosure, hopefully allowing the herd to expand its range and increase in size.

WHITE MOUNTAIN GRASSLAND WILDLIFE AREA WORK PROJECT

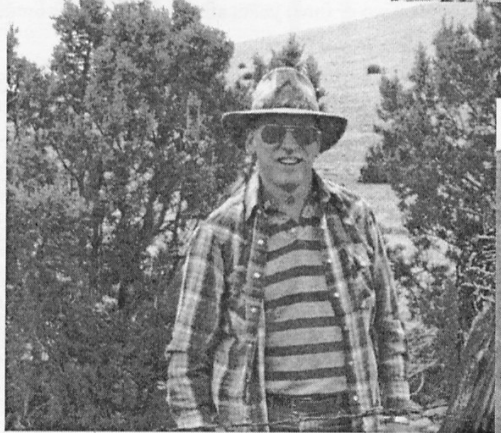
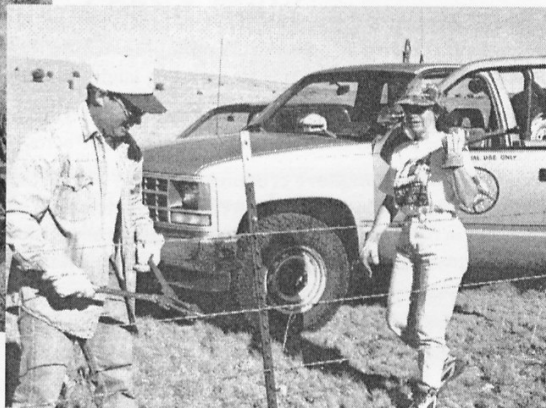
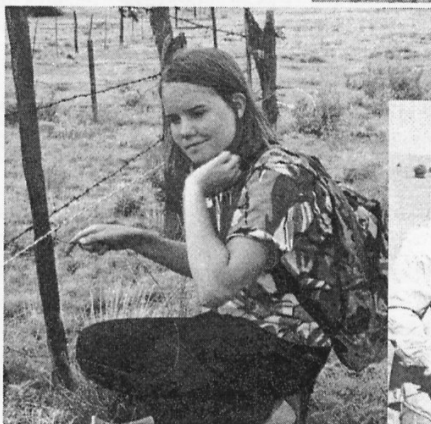
On the weekend of July 28 and 29, volunteers from the Foundation did a variety of projects at the White Mountain Grassland Wildlife Area, located about 4 miles west of Springerville, to improve conditions for antelope and other wildlife. The property, composed of the former Ocote and Cross L Ranches, was acquired by the Arizona Game and Fish Department only a year or so ago. With 2,850 acres of deeded land and about 8,140 acres of leased Arizona state lands, it is a key year-round use area for approximately 100 antelope and provides winter range for as many as 700 elk.

Working under the watchful eye of AG&FD Region I game specialist Dave Cagle, 25 volunteers removed over a mile of interior livestock fence, made another 2.5 miles more antelope-friendly by removing the bottom barbed strand and replacing it with a smooth strand located 18" above the -round, and thinned some encroaching junipers. Although daytime temperatures were on the warm side for the area, the evenings were beautiful, which made the Saturday night steak cookout all the more enjoyable. A lot of people contributed toward putting the cookout together, but Bill and Mary Keebler deserve special recognition for all the time and hard work they put in.

The Foundation received a letter of thanks from Region I Supervisor Richard Remington shortly after the project was completed.

PARTICIPANTS

Guy Baldwin
Dave Cagle (AG&FD Region I)
Jerry Guevin
Bob Hanlin
Marilyn Hanlin
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David Hussey
Joanne Hussey
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Dwight Wilson
Christopher Wing



My First Antelope Hunt Continued...

had to be his, so he was around somewhere. The sun finally succumbed to the shadows of night and we headed off to camp. I don't know if you could really call it camp since it was a wonderful cabin belonging to our friend and fellow guide Dean Bowdoin. This cabin was in close proximity to our unit and had a shower and microwave, things I was not accustomed to during hunting trips. I enjoyed this type of camp and felt somewhat spoiled.

Opening day, we arose early and sneaked into Mr. Big's area before sunrise. As the sun began to smile its early blue-gray grin, we started making out the outline of other vehicles. Soon we were able to see just enough to make out antelope on the move, next we heard a shot ring out from that area. How could this be, we had only seen three other people in all our scouting trips. We then saw this monarch fall. I was stunned and upset at the same time someone else had shot my buck.

Where in the heck did all these people come from! I thought, all that hard work canceled out in just the first few minutes of my dream hunt. No time to dwell on it, off to find Hugo. Thank goodness he was in his usual neighborhood, but again there were several other people here too.

We got out and went in pursuit. This area was very open and it would be hard to stay stealth enough to go undetected especially since they were already acting very nervous. They spotted us and took off, we held back letting them stop and settle down a little. We then began another stalk but couldn't get close enough for a shot. Soon they went over a small crest and disappeared out of sight. We were just about to follow, when all of a sudden here they came back trotting right towards us. We sat on a small hill and the route they were on looked like it might bring them within range. Sure enough they came into view within range to make a shot. Hugo was lagging slightly behind and just as he was about to walk out to the magical spot, they spooked and took off. I could not pivot my gun fast enough to keep him in the scope. They disappeared over a rise; I had missed my chance. We tried one more stalk but they were too leery and their fantastic eyesight wouldn't allow us to get into range. On to plan C, Mr. Heart. We drove over to his territory, which also seemed to be crawling with human activity. We saw a few other bucks around but they were all dinks and not worthy enough to pursue on opening day, which was rapidly coming to an end.

Day two had us heading back to Hugo's hangout before light. We were running a little behind schedule and it was starting to get light. We still had a few more miles to go, but as we started to crest a small hill John spotted a very nice buck just ahead. We backed slowly out of sight, quietly got out and started sneaking to the top of the hill. This group of antelope had now fed across the road. As we planned our strategy we noticed a vehicle barreling down the road coming at us from the other direction. They were oblivious to use since our truck was out of sight. The vehicle stopped as they saw the antelope spook; of course it was a Game and Fish truck. The officer then saw us get up from our hiding spot and watch as we approached his truck. The officer was Jim Burton and wouldn't you know John knew

him, so we had to be somewhat nice as we sarcastically thanked him for blowing our stalk. After a short visit we decided to head off over the rise that the antelope had disappeared over in hopes of finding them. They were about a mile away so we started a stalk, just as we were about into range they would move along keeping just out of reach. It was like they were teasing us, it was very frustrating and now it was getting hot out. After more than 3 hours of sneaking, crawling on our hands and knees, slithering on our bellies and sometimes just lying there baking in the sun. *I am so glad I took notes at the clinic and had my kneepads.* We finally decided we had it. We weren't making up any ground and were pretty sure by their actions they knew where we were. I decided to name this buck Mr. S.O.B.

We started driving into different areas looking for other antelope. We ran into Dean, he told us of a huge buck hanging out at the Timberland Ranch and didn't think anyone was hunting him because of his location. We all drove to a hill that gave us a vantage point to watch from. After a few hours of watching, he and his harem started drifting towards the fence. Soon they traveled off the ranch and to an area we could hunt. We planned our stalk but it would be difficult because he had so many does with him to keep watch. Because of this slow going we ran out of daylight and made our way back to the truck in the cloak of darkness. That night we decided we would move in on him before daylight and nail him before he and his harem could seek refuge back at the ranch. Wrong again, they were already back at the ranch by first light. After watching for awhile it was plain to see they had no plans on leaving again any time soon. As we left I nicknamed this buck Mr. Evasive. We thought we would go look up Hugo and see if he was still around. Sure enough he was back at his old hangout. But again there was another hunter a ways off watching him. We got out and went in pursuit; again they seemed to stay out of range. Finally they went down a hill, around a little bend and over a rise. We headed after them. We were almost to the top of the rise when John tapped me on the shoulder. I turned and down behind us was the buck walking back to his hangout. He was unaware of our location, so I slowly knelt down steadied my rifle on the bipod and found the buck in the scope. John whispered 272 yards I took careful aim and squeezed the trigger; the rifle report cracked the silence. It sounded like a hit but the buck just kept walking, I panicked thinking I had missed. OH NO! I hurried another round into the chamber and pulled on the trigger just as the buck fell to his final resting-place. The second shot never hit him. As I walked up to him I thought Hugo doesn't look as big as I remembered. As we got closer we both realized this wasn't Hugo at all, but another buck. As you can see from the photo he is a wonderful buck. He is right at 15" with good mass and beautiful features. Today I have him mounted on my fireplace wall and have named him Dandy. Because he is a dandy of a buck, and dandy on the taste buds. I look forward to my next antelope hunt.

This was the most enjoyable, frustrating and hardest hunt I have ever had, and can't wait to repeat the process. I only hope I don't have to wait another seven years.

Annual Board of Directors Meeting November 12th, 2001

6:30pm

The Education Building of the Phoenix Zoo
455 N. Galvin Parkway in Phoenix

The purpose of the annual meeting will be the election of officers and directors for 2002 and to conduct any other business of the Foundation. The nominating committee has nominated the following slate of officers and directors for 2002.

President: Bill Keebler

Vice President: Jerry Guevin

Secretary: Dave Verhelst

Treasurer: Bill Hook

Directors: (Term ending 12/31/02): David E. Brown, James Mehen and James Unmacht.
(Term ending 12/31/03): Dave Laird, Richard Long and Richard Michalek.

The November Board meeting will follow. Please try to attend.

***Thank You! Thank You!! Thank You!!!
To all that attended the AAF Hunters Clinic.
We Hope You Had A Great Time!***

Weekend Work Project: October 20th and 21st, 2001. Unit 21 approximately 90 miles North of Phoenix on I-17. Take Dugas turnoff 4-5 miles East. Follow signs to project. For more information please contact any of the Board members listed in the front of this publication.

**Do You Have
Something To Say??
*Submit an article to the
Pronghorn!***



*If we use your article in an issue - we'll
give you a complimentary AAF hat.*

RIFLE RAFFLE

Weatherby Mark-V Ultra Light
.257 with 3-9X Zeiss Conquest Rifle
Scope, Harris Bipod and
Aluminum Hardcase.



***Don't Miss Out! Call any of the Board
Members listed in the front of this
publication now for your tickets!***

2001 New Members!

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Shane & Tiffany May, Peoria
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Jorn Ortiz, Cottonwood
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Christopher Vallejos, Flagstaff
Eugene F. Wullkotte, II, Pine
Lloyd M. Wundrock, Tucson
Dean H. Zuern, Tucson

*From the antelope of Arizona
and all that love these great
animals, we thank you for your
support and welcome you.*

SPORTSMAN'S CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS!

WHAT?	WHEN?	WHERE?
The Arizona Antelope Foundation's work project	Weekend of October 20 th & 21 st	See page 6 for details
The Arizona Antelope Foundation's Annual Board of directors meeting	November 12 th , 2001	The Phoenix Zoo 455 N. Galvin Parkway
The Arizona Game & Fish Dept. Commission meeting	October 19 th & 20 th , 2001	The Fraternal Order of Police building 12858 N. 19 th Ave. Phoenix
Payson Chapter of DU Banquet	October 13 th 2001	Payson, AZ. For more info call 1-800-45Ducks
Ahwatukee Chapter of DU Banquet	October 20 th 2001	Ahwatukee, AZ. For more info call 1-800-45Ducks
Phoenix DU Banquet	December 11 th , 2001	Phoenix, AZ. For more info call 1-800-45Ducks

If we left out an event that you feel is important to the sportsmen & women of our organization we apologize. Please send us any information that you feel might benefit our members and we will happily add it to our Calendar of Events.

Send to PO Box 15501 Phoenix, AZ 85060-5501 or E-mail to eagleyeoutdoor@qwest.net