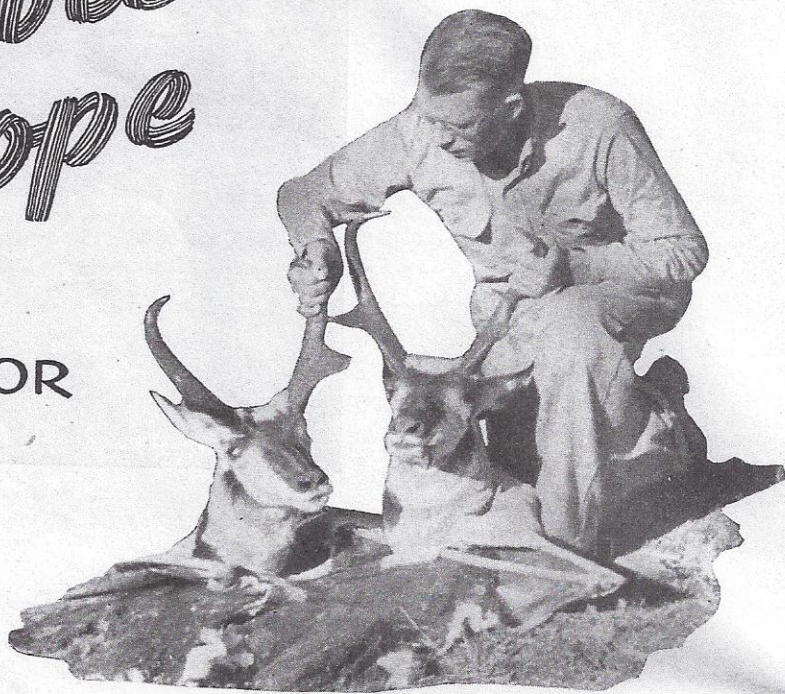


The Incredible Antelope

By JACK O'CONNOR

Jack O'Connor compares two good heads taken by his party in typical pronghorn country



A COUPLE of friends of mine drove up in front of my house one day with two buck antelope. They almost caused a traffic jam, and one passer-by, who stood gaping at them, said, "Good Lord, there just ain't any such deer!"

That is about the usual reaction to a first sight of that amazing creature, the pronghorn. The average American is used to looking at deer, and when an antelope comes along he isn't prepared for it.

A big buck antelope feeling his oats, prancing along with his rump patch extended so he looks as if someone had tied a sofa pillow on his rear end, his red mane up, his fantastic-looking black horns coming just above his eyes, looks like nothing else in the modern world—except an antelope.

Yet this strange-looking "deer" is destined to be what he once was—one of the most important of American game animals. For the pronghorn has made an astonishing comeback, so much so that most Western states now have open season on antelope, and any sportsman in the United States with a yen to vary his diet of deer hunting can go after the animals by coming West and buying a nonresident license. Even now, several thousands are taken annually in such states as Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, New Mexico, and Arizona. The antelope is crowding the elk as one of the most important game animals in this country, and soon he may come third to the white-tail and mule deer.

Antelope are hardy and prolific, and their favorite range is open and sparsely timbered country which will produce no other big game.

Yet in spite of the growing importance of the antelope as game, the average sportsman knows about as much about him as he does about the musk ox or the Tibetan argali. Some years ago an antelope story of mine in

OUTDOOR LIFE started a controversy which raged for months. This probably will too.

The antelope not only looks strange; he is strange. He has no close relatives anywhere in the world. Instead he is the last surviving member of a large family of animals which ranged over North America millions of years ago. At one time there were antelope no larger than foxes, antelope with spiral horns, antelope with four horns. But long before the coming of the white man, probably before the coming of the Indian, they became extinct, and only our pronghorn remains.

THE pronghorn shows his relationship to deer in that his horns are branched and that he sheds them annually. He shows his relationship to sheep and to old-world antelope in that, unlike deer, he has a gall bladder, and that his horns are not antlers, which are bone, but true horns, composed of hair. He sheds only the branched outer shell, keeping the core over which the horn grows. And that accounts for the story that antelope never shed their horns. The mechanics of the shedding are these: In late October or early November, the horns begin to crack and curl at the base, and the new horn begins to grow from the core beneath. As the shell loosens, the new horn pushes the old one off. By the first weeks in December, most of the antelope I have observed, have shed the shell. By the middle of March the new horn is about grown, but very soft. In July it is hard, jet black, perfect; and by late August, the bucks are beginning to fight for the

does. Does, too, have horns—little unbranched spikes never more than four inches long, which they also shed.

The horns of the bucks are cruel weapons. The points are curved and very sharp. During the mating season, which begins in most sections during the last part of August, the bucks fight ferociously for the harems of does. Animals killed then or shortly after, when the open seasons begin in most states, almost always bear the marks of conflict. Practically all bucks will have long, ugly-looking slits in their necks where their rivals have nicked them. Now and then a beaten buck will be killed. Punctured lungs and punctured abdomens are far from uncommon. Locked horns come about occasionally too. In my files I have pictures of two such bucks that died on the range.

Like the horns of bighorn sheep, those of antelope continue to get larger as long as they live. The present world's record has stood for more than forty years, an enormous head that measures 20 5/16 inches along the beam. The animal that grew those horns was a very old buck. How old? You've got me. Antelope may live to be twenty or even older. One buck I know of, the last of an isolated herd that was killed off by poachers, has run in the same locality, completely alone as far as his own kind is concerned, for fourteen years, and he was a mature buck when the last of his fellows was killed. However, the big old bucks, the ones with the near-record heads, are usually past their prime, and have been booted out of the herd at mating time

ONCE ON THE VERGE OF EXTINCTION, THE PROLIFIC PRONGHORN SEEMS DESTINED TO BECOME OUR NO. 3 BIG-GAME ANIMAL

by younger and more agile rivals. In August and September, the harems of does are usually in charge of some young fellow with a rather insignificant head, and the big boys with the towering lyre-shape horns are back at the edge of the timber, looking wistfully on.

In their prime, the horns of mature buck antelope are beautiful things, and the man after a trophy should pick them for symmetry as much as for length. The bases should be massive, the prongs even and prominent, and the tips well hooked. The horns themselves should be black, and the tips clear as crystal. Such horns, mounted on a vivid contrasting scalp, make a trophy second to none in beauty.

WHY, if antelope shed their horns, aren't the horns found? This question is often asked. The horns disintegrate quickly, from rain and dew and cold. Rodents eat them, too; and within a month after they are shed, it is almost impossible to find even one.

Something that is difficult to believe unless you have seen it, is the speed of an antelope. The pronghorn is one of the fastest things on legs, and also one of the most enduring. Often one will be going so fast as to amaze the hunter, then a bullet just behind him will almost double his speed. He will run against men on horseback, against

trains, automobiles—anything! Much conflicting testimony comes from the fact that he will run just a little faster than the thing he is racing. The man on the horse will testify that the antelope can run just a bit faster than his cow pony. The locomotive engineer will swear that the antelope can go just a shade faster than his train—and so on.

One thing I have noticed is that when antelope are really frightened, it is the big buck that is always behind; hence I have concluded that does are faster than bucks. But I'll leave my own experience out of this, and simply record one checked and double-checked instance.

A couple of years ago a research scientist employed by the division of federal aid, Arizona Game and Fish Commission, was driving along a graded road on Anderson Mesa in northern Arizona when a buck decided to race him. The buck was running over volcanic boulders—not very good footing for a speed test—and he was also running uphill, about an 8 percent grade. The speedometer of the car—a tested one, by the way—registered 45 miles an hour, and the antelope kept even, appearing to be running as fast as he could. "Ah," thought the scientist, "that is as fast as an antelope can run." Then the buck put on a burst of speed,

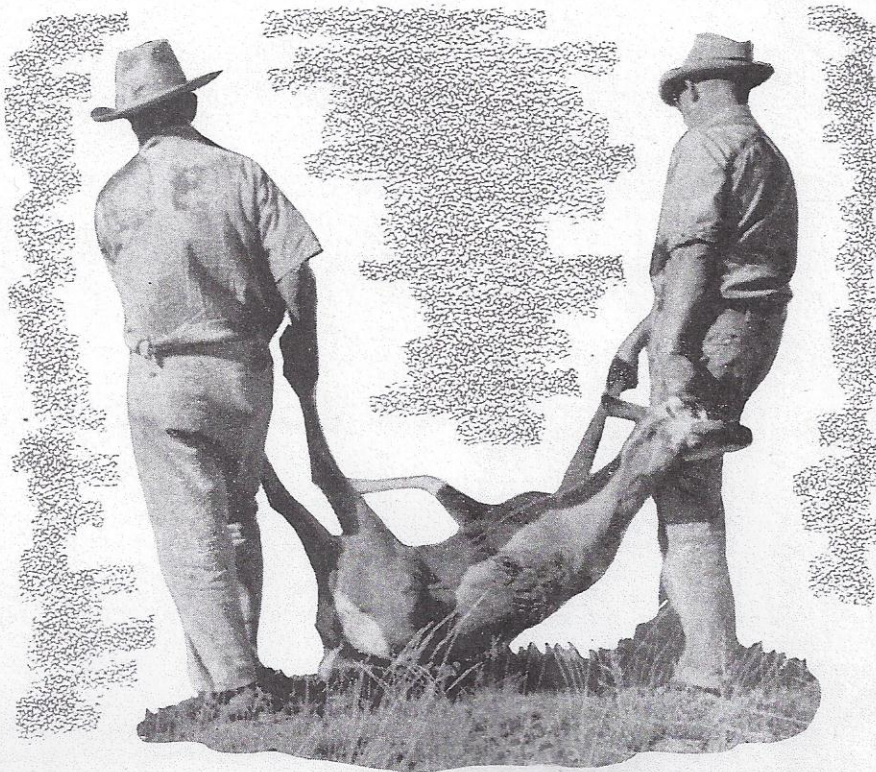


The author measures the spread of a hefty buck

cut in front of the car, outran it, and disappeared into the timber. A half-dozen men witnessed the performance. How fast was that buck running at his highest speed? At least 50, possibly 55. How fast could he have gone if he had been on smooth, firm ground? If he had been thoroughly scared? You've got me.

Another traditionally fabulous thing about the pronghorn is his eyes. What wonderful eyes they are! The bighorn sheep too has famous eyes and, indeed, they can pick up *moving* objects miles away. However, the vaunted eyes of the bighorn are no better on stationary objects than those of deer. Once some years ago, I sat on the top of a rock, within fifteen feet of a bighorn which had been browsing below. When the sheep finally discovered me it stared at me for five minutes trying to figure out what I was. It did not run until I moved.

THE eyes of the antelope, on the other hand, have the power of resolving the nature of stationary objects at great distances. Many a time I have come up over a ridge and seen a herd of antelope all feeding heads down several hundred yards away. I'd lie down, pull out the glasses, and start looking, moving not a mite. But in a minute or two the antelope would spot me. Their eyes are so good that I am convinced that they are superior to those of human beings with good 8X glasses. Some years ago I spent about two days a week for four months, spying on them with glasses. I saw fawns born, coyotes chased off by irate does, bucks fighting practice bouts. Those antelope grew so used to me that they almost quit looking at me when they would discover me lying on a ridge with the glasses. Then one day I took a friend along with me. They knew he was a stranger, even at 500 (Continued on page 61)



Antelope seldom dress out at more than 100 pounds, but bringing one in is often a two-man job

The Incredible Antelope

(Continued from page 23)

yards, and moved off. I'd like to bet they could tell if he needed a shave.

Another oft-repeated antelope story is the one about how they can be decoyed to the hunter by waving a flag. It may have been true once, but I have had absolutely no luck with it. They will stand off at from 500 to 1,000 yards and gape at the flag, but I have never been able to get them within easy shooting distance.

Hunting the pronghorn is as different from hunting white-tail deer as shooting grouse is from shooting ducks. A man hunting in excellent white-tail country is lucky if he sees ten or fifteen deer in the course of a day. On the other hand, an antelope hunter in country equally good will see a hundred or more pronghorns.

The typical shot at white-tails is at from twenty-five to fifty or 100 yards, but at antelope it is around 250 yards. The more open the country, the more difficult antelope are to hunt, and really wild antelope are a tough proposition, the tougher because they often seem deceptively tame.

America is a land richly endowed. In time of war, however, our heritage in natural resources is greatly endangered. If we sportsmen would preserve our wildlife, it is up to every one of us to pitch in and support the work of conservation. It's the fees we pay to hunt and fish that make conservation possible, so

BUY A LICENSE!

even if you don't expect to use it.

On the other hand, antelope in timber are not at all hard to stalk, as they don't hear particularly well and their noses aren't nearly so keen as those of deer. A trick which I have seen worked many times is this: Here is a big, lone buck 500 yards away, watching you. Look at him as if you meant no harm to him, and walk at right angles until you get a tree between you. Then go as fast as you can toward the buck. When you get to the tree, pause for a moment to get your wind, then step out and let him have it.

Another trick is to get off a horse, walk behind him, head down, edging gradually nearer. Antelope are curious. That extra pair of legs on the horse is too much for their mentality. Until too late, they just can't dope it out. A man hunting in Mexico, on the great sandy playos of northern Sonora, couldn't get within 500 yards until he tried covering himself with a sheet. He cut eye holes so he could see where he was going, then walked right up to the buck he wanted.

Simply getting out of sight and waiting à la duck blind is not a bad stunt where antelope are plentiful. On a recent trip, all the members of my party, except one, got bucks within an hour the first day. After the initial cannonading, the bucks were wild, and though my friend saw fifty or sixty good ones he couldn't get close enough for a decent shot. Finally, discouraged, weary, and thirsty, he lay down in the shade of a cedar. A couple of bucks trotted up within range, and he got one.

To the sportsman whose experience is limited to white-tail hunting in the thickly wooded East, the range at which antelope can be shot sounds incredible. At 400 yards or so, an antelope thinks he is safe from rifle bullets, and the man who can lay them in at that distance will have little trouble getting his buck.

In fact, one of the best antelope outfits I can think of is the Eastern woodchuck rifle of the heavier variety. Recently, a good target shot of my acquaintance got his buck at exactly 440 yards with a .270 mounted with a 10X target 'scope. The distance was checked by a game warden in a car, who drove from the imprint of my friend's posterior under a cedar to the place where the buck lay. The longest shot I ever made on an antelope was 535 paces over bowlders—probably around 500 yards.

My own experience is that antelope can carry a lot of lead, and I have seen them run a quarter of a mile or more with their hearts blown to bits. However, men with more experience than I have, say they have found them easy to kill. After all, the experience of any one man isn't worth very much as conditions vary so greatly in big-game hunting. On the whole, though, the antelope rifle, because of the long-range shooting so often necessary, ought to have a velocity of at least 2,700 feet a second. The bullets ought to be of such a type as to expand easily too. Cartridges like the .250/3000 and .300 Savage, 7 mm. with the 139 and 150-grain bullets, the .257 with the 100-grain, the .270 with the 100 and 130-grain bullets, and the .30/06 with the 150 and 180-grain bullets are satisfactory. For the really long shot at from 350 to 500 yards, the .270 is about as good as one can get, and the .300 Magnum should be excellent.

What does antelope meat taste like? Well, it is very good. Even during and just after the mating season, when the bucks can be smelled 100 yards away, their flesh is not strong. An antelope shot before the mating season—in the late spring and summer, when they probably should be hunted, and are hunted in a couple of states—is second in goodness only to the meat of the bighorn sheep, and almost as free from any gaminess as a steak from a corn-fed Midwestern steer. Antelope are nervous, active animals and I have never seen a really fat one, in the same sense that deer are fat. A buck mule or white-tail deer often has a layer of fat on his rump, two or three inches thick. Not the antelope. Instead his meat is internally lubricated, and it is never dry like venison. Antelope saddles were a great delicacy among the epicures of forty or fifty years ago—and they are still just as good.

How big is this curious creature, the pronghorn? About the size of a hungry two-year-old Pennsylvania white-tail. An average buck will weigh from eighty to ninety pounds. The largest I have ever seen went 105. Their conspicuous coloring makes them look larger than they are, and many hunters are disappointed at their size the first time they knock one over.

Anyway, the pronghorns are fine game animals, and the sportsman who finds himself in the West, on the tail-end of his vacation, misses a good bet if he doesn't hunt them. Mr. Sportsman and Mr. Pronghorn ought to get acquainted!



Duxbak

**DURABILITY AND
COMFORT CHOSEN
BY WAR WORKERS**

Outdoor workers in shipyards, plane plants and other war industries are discovering what you sportsmen have known for years — that DUXBAK garments are tops in service, protection and comfort.

That, and the fact that much of our production is going to the army, is the reason why your dealer may not be able to supply you this year. So we urge you to take special care of your present garments... and, remember, when the big hunt is over — we will again have a complete line of your favorite sports clothes—DUXBAK!

UTICA Duxbak CORP.
TRADE MARK

UTICA-DUXBAK CORPORATION
822 Noyes Street, Utica, N.Y.

BUY WAR BONDS AND STAMPS!