

I'll Take Luck Every Time!
by Dave Burpee

You know the old saying: "It is better to be lucky than good." My recent antelope hunt is proof positive about the accuracy of that saying.

I left Virginia with four friends on August 17th. We travelled in two vehicles and two-and-a-half days and about 2,000 miles later arrived at the Werner Ranch, which is about 40 minutes due north of Douglas, Wyoming. We were joined by another friend who drove in from Lawton, Oklahoma. One of the guys set this trip up several years ago to be a bi-annual event on odd years. He has been about a dozen times. This was my fourth trip. The previous three were successful, with one animal qualifying for Pope and Young. However, each year is different and in hunting there are no guarantees.....

This was a five-day hunt so none of us were in a hurry to take an animal. We did not want to target yearlings or barely mature bucks, but the first fully mature buck that came into range was in danger.

We were using longbows and recurves with wooden arrows so the action needed to be up close and personal. To accomplish this, the method of hunting was focused on wooden blinds set near watering holes. Hopefully animals would come to drink and do so within range of traditional archery – which for us tops out at about 20 yards.

Antelope typically are VERY wary when coming to water. Bucks will let does and fawns water while they stand far off and observe. Bucks also slowly feed towards water while continually watching the waterhole for any sign of unusual movement or a predator. This presents challenges to the hunter because, even though the hunter is in a blind, the antelope's eyesight is fantastic and movement within the blind can be spotted, even from a distance.

After a great breakfast, we were taken to our blinds. We had our lunches and reading material as we would not be picked up unless we got an animal or it got dark, whichever came first. I was dropped off at my blind about 7 AM and spent a few minutes getting set up. At the end of that process I sat in my chair, exhaled and looked out the shooting window to my right. There, eight yards away and looking right at me, was a doe. Ten minutes in the blind and busted! I was sure she and her fawns would bolt, but they did not – just turned and walked away from the water feeding naturally.

I felt fortunate ("lucky") they did not dash off and thus did not alert a HUGE antelope that I noticed feeding about 300 yards away. I watched him for almost an hour, but he was not interested in water. I figured, "OK, feed now and water later. I've got time."

I had been watching that buck for some time when I decided to look out a window to my left. And, lucky me, there was another nice buck about 200 yards away just cresting the top of a hill. My luck continued to compound as this buck disobeyed all antelope rules about approaching a water hole. No feeding. No stops to observe. Just a steady walk straight to the water and immediately began to drink – 15 yards from me. I counted my blessings, nocked an arrow that was tipped with a 145-grain Eclipse broadhead, slowly drew back my Great Northern Lil' Creep longbow – and missed! The arrow was centered on the sweet spot but unfortunately too high and over the back by an inch.

Here fate (luck) intervened again. An antelope that is missed low will run like the wind 110% of the time. An antelope missed high will VERY occasionally not run as he mistakes the sound of the feathers passing as a bird or an insect. I'm not sure why mine did not run, but he didn't. He took three quick steps to his left and froze. It also probably helped that my arrow fairly silently buried in mud. He stood there for a few minutes assessing what had just happened and finally decided that everything was OK. He turned, returned to almost his same hoof prints to continue drinking and presented me with another broadside shot. I counted my blessings, quit kicking myself for the miss and this time put an arrow in the right place. My five-day hunt was done in the first hour. Considering the circumstances, it does not get better – or luckier – than that.

The buck was nicer than I thought when viewed from the blind. It scored 5/8" short of Pope and Young and had a nice body. I spent the rest of the week hanging around the ranch, reading, and helping others with their antelope.

After very little activity at his water hole, one of my friends shot an antelope on the second evening when a group of seven bucks came running in to chase off a young buck that was already watering. His buck netted 66" and was also taken with a Great Northern Lil' Creep longbow and a homemade wood arrow topped with a 145-grain Eclipse broadhead.

A second friend also connected on the second day of the hunt. He arrowed his first ever antelope with a 7-yard quartering away shot using a Bear magnesium handle takedown bow and homemade Douglas fir arrow with 160-grain Ace Standard broadhead.

Late on day three, a third friend connected on his 69 4/8" Pope and Young animal using a Great Northern Lil' Creep longbow and handmade wooden arrow.

The remaining two hunters did not get traffic at their waterholes and so did not take an antelope, proving once again that luck can be both positive and negative.

Naturally all this hunting was enhanced by friendship and stories shared over meals and while relaxing in the evening. We all had a wonderful time and are already looking forward to the 2021 hunt.