



There be giants in Wyoming

by John Vanko

Eli Grimm's buck with long prongs and good mass measured 85 6/8" B&C and 86" SCI.

Eli Grimm wondered what the winter kill might have done to the antelope as he drove to Wyoming in early September. His hunts in Arizona and New Mexico were over and he drove north to get his scouting finished before the arrival of his clients. As co-owner of Pronghorn Guide Service he also guides for a couple of different outfitters in Wyoming in some of America's most famous antelope country, central Wyoming. Had the snows and temperatures of last winter killed off all the big heads? That's what he wondered while towing the camper north for so many hours.

Central Wyoming is huge. It's a lot of territory to cover and the season had started. Surely the first-weekend hunters hadn't killed all the big boys. He was surprised to find so few animals. There are not many permits in these units and it's a good thing. After days of scouting he began seeing, and recording, notable antelope in all the units.

There was one buck in particular that looked especially good. Now it was just a matter of waiting for his first hunter to arrive.

The odds are long for these fine units, with so few non-resident permits, and maximum preference points are required, but even then it doesn't guarantee a permit. But if you don't apply you'll never get a license. Thankfully Wyoming's system allows you to make a second and a third choice.

Eli's first client killed a buck that scored 87 2/8 B&C and 88 2/8 SCI. Later, his second client killed an 88 4/8 B&C, 90 1/8 SCI. Both beautiful trophies, as well as major achievements.

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After that it was off to another unit for Eli's own buck. I arrived in the first week of October to see what Eli had found. He showed me photographs of the bigger bucks. I was amazed at what a persistent, concentrated, patient effort can produce.

Eli decided he had seen every buck worth shooting in the area. This morning the buck he chose was 900 or a thousand yards away. Eli set out in plain sight, blaze orange and all, walking straight down into the valley.

It was a long walk and the sun was not yet shining over the rim. The wind was a cold biting breeze. Eli stopped to scope the buck. He jumped other antelope in the sage along his route. They ran off. One was worth shooting but Eli thought his original target was better. His buck took note of this commotion and slowly walked toward the opposite rim of the valley.

Eli continued to close the distance. Then he went prone. I put the binoculars on the buck, now in the sun. Down he went! Then I heard the shot – they were more than half a mile away. Eli said he ranged the buck at 550 yards. The 7mm Remington Magnum Grimm Rifle by McMillan firing a 168-gr. Berger VLD bullet at 3110 fps had done its job.



My last-day buck was huge in body. I harvested him with the longest shot I've ever made. —John Vanko

I started the FJ and drove a long circuitous route around the rim and then up the center of the valley. The buck was outstanding - great mass, long prongs, great length.

Quick measurements and photographs - be certain you take as many as you think necessary, then take some more. After your trophy is quartered and in the truck there's no way to reconstruct a good field photograph. It's over, so don't miss the best opportunity to preserve your memories. After 60 days of drying Eli's trophy scored 85 6/8 B&C, 86 SCI.

Since Eli was finished hunting he offered to tow the camper closer to my area. We broke camp and set out to see if I could find myself a respectable trophy. One criterion for our next campsite was cell phone reception. We ended up camping high on a rim with a view of a town far in the distance. It was beautiful at night but that October wind blew cold.

The season was nearly over. I didn't have two weeks to scout, I had four days. Eli offered to drive while I glassed. On the rim we saw one lone buck that we judged at net 80. He was wild, like he had been shot at all season. From the time we first saw him he never stopped running. I noted his location and kept looking.

We drove farther south, down to another lonely town. We crossed the highway and drove south to the border with the next unit. The next day we scouted this southern portion again, and began seeing more antelope, much more than in the north. There were a few bucks but nothing better than that one buck up on the rim.

The fourth day arrived, my last day to hunt. I had a plane to catch and couldn't push the timeline to the limit. I decided on the rim buck. We searched and searched but couldn't find him. Buck mule deer, wild horses, those we could find, but my 80-inch buck? No.

The sun was bright, the air was cold, the sky was blue, and we had to look elsewhere. As we slowly made our way closer to town we found a hilly pocket full of antelope. They didn't like our vehicle disturbing their peace so they vacated the premises. One buck stood out because of the size of his body - he was distinctly larger than all the other antelope. I couldn't get a good look at his horns from all angles but if they were sized in proportion to his body they should be good. As luck would have it we couldn't find him on the other side of the hills.



Gear List

- **RIFLE:** Savage 110L in 7mm Remington Mag
- **BULLETS:** 168-gr Berger VLDs
- **SCOPE:** Leupold 3X-9X Vari-X II
- **OPTICS:** Nikon Monarch 12X56
- **SPOTTING SCOPE:** Swarovski
- **BIPOD:** Versapod

After a long loop and a bit of lunch we spotted him again. Eli obliged me and drove along the two-track as close as he dared. The buck and his does were angling away leaving the vicinity. I hopped out, and chambered a round. Eli ranged the distance at 350 yards. My Savage 110L 7mm Remington Magnum shooting 168-gr. Berger VLDs in Gunwerks custom ammo at 3050 fps was sighted-in to be about 3 to 4 inches high at 100 yards, a couple inches high at 200, and a few inches low at 300. It's a dead-on hold out to 325. Now the buck was farther away so I held the horizontal crosshair of the Leupold Vari-X II just above his back, with a little daylight showing through. I don't have a tactical scope like Eli so I had to estimate the drop and hold the crosshairs high.

The big-bodied buck paused for just a fraction of a second and I let the VLD fly. He stumbled, took a few more steps, and went down. I asked Eli to range me when I walked up to my buck. He called it at 417 yards - my longest shot ever. I began to wonder if I needed one of those long-range, tactical scopes.

The sun was beginning to get low in the West. We took hasty photos, I tagged my buck, and loaded him in the truck for the trip back to camp. There I quartered him, removed the backstraps and tenderloins, and took quick measurements.

His bases were most impressive at 6 7/8. His right prong was chipped, the one I couldn't see through the spotting scope. But his body was big. It measured 17" from withers to brisket, 38.5" from rump to front of chest. Eli said Arizona antelope usually measure 14". So I was right about the size of this buck, but his horns were not commensurate with his body. After 60 days of drying he scored 77 SCI - my longest-range trophy antelope if not my largest.

My buck is a great example of a good hunt with good company, enjoyed every minute. Sometimes you get the big one, sometimes you don't. Most of all I savored this hunt immensely. Four days with one of America's finest antelope guides are four days well spent. I can't wait to do it again.

And my trophy? Just right, I'd say, for a last day buck. 🏆

Editor's Note: If you are interested in hunting Wyoming contact Western Lands Outfitters at 801-731-4156. The Grimmer's guide antelope hunts for them in Wyoming.