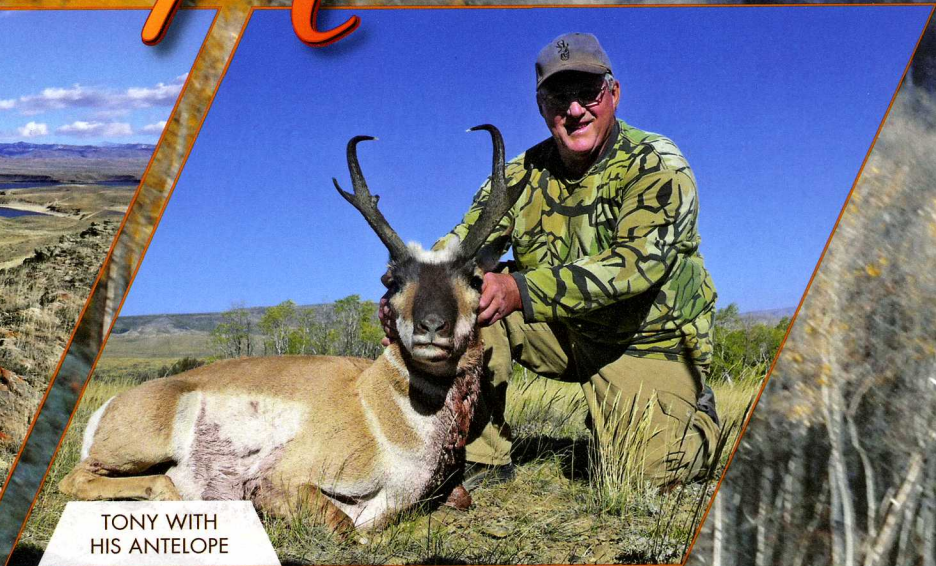
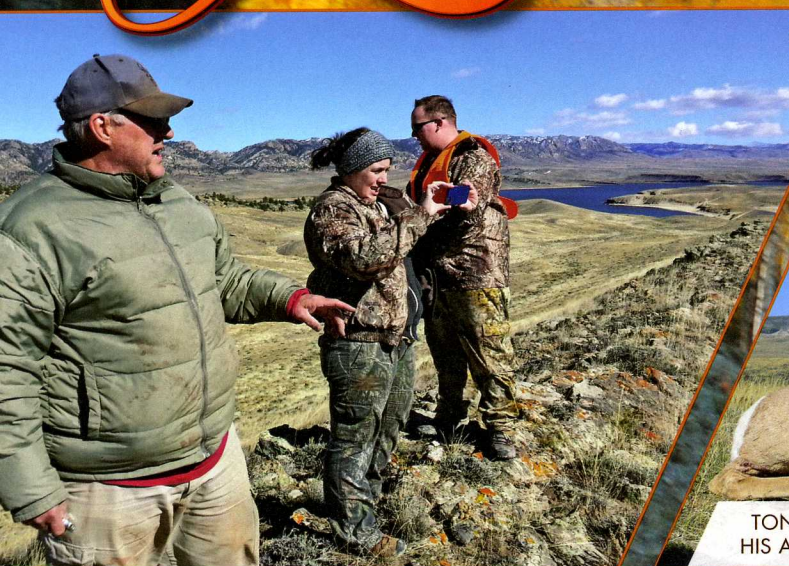


# • LESSONS IN • TROPHY HUNTING



TONY WITH  
HIS ANTELOPE



HUNTER: JOHN VANKO  
SCORE: 84 0/8"  
SPECIES: ANTELOPE  
LOCATION: WYOMING

**E**very year I learn something new, and this year was no exception. I was excited at the prospect of hunting later in the season. I had hunted this unit many times before,

but always early, starting on opening day. In the last couple years, we had seen and heard reports of magnificent antelope taken at the close of the season, so last year we hunted just a little later and I took my best trophy – professional help really paid off. This year, we hunted later still, hoping to duplicate the spectacular results we had seen by others.

Tony had scouted this unit and photographed three or four interesting bucks. We searched first high, then low. Four weeks earlier, Tony's first client took his buck up high, the only good one they had seen in the uplands. Much to my surprise, the high country held nothing of interest when we drove it our first day. Evidently all the good bucks were down low, and that's where we would spend the rest of our time. We found two of them that Tony had photographed before but not the third. The first we called the "Immigrant Buck" because he was near the Immigrant Trail but on private land. The second I called the "Dead Cow Buck" because there was a cow carcass along the road where we had first seen him. The third buck, the

"Wide Buck," was nowhere to be seen. At the end of the second day of hunting, Tony's outfitter sent a cell phone photo and it was of the Wide Buck. His daughter had killed the Wide Buck the previous week, no wonder we couldn't find him. He was very good, one we would not have passed up had we found him first.

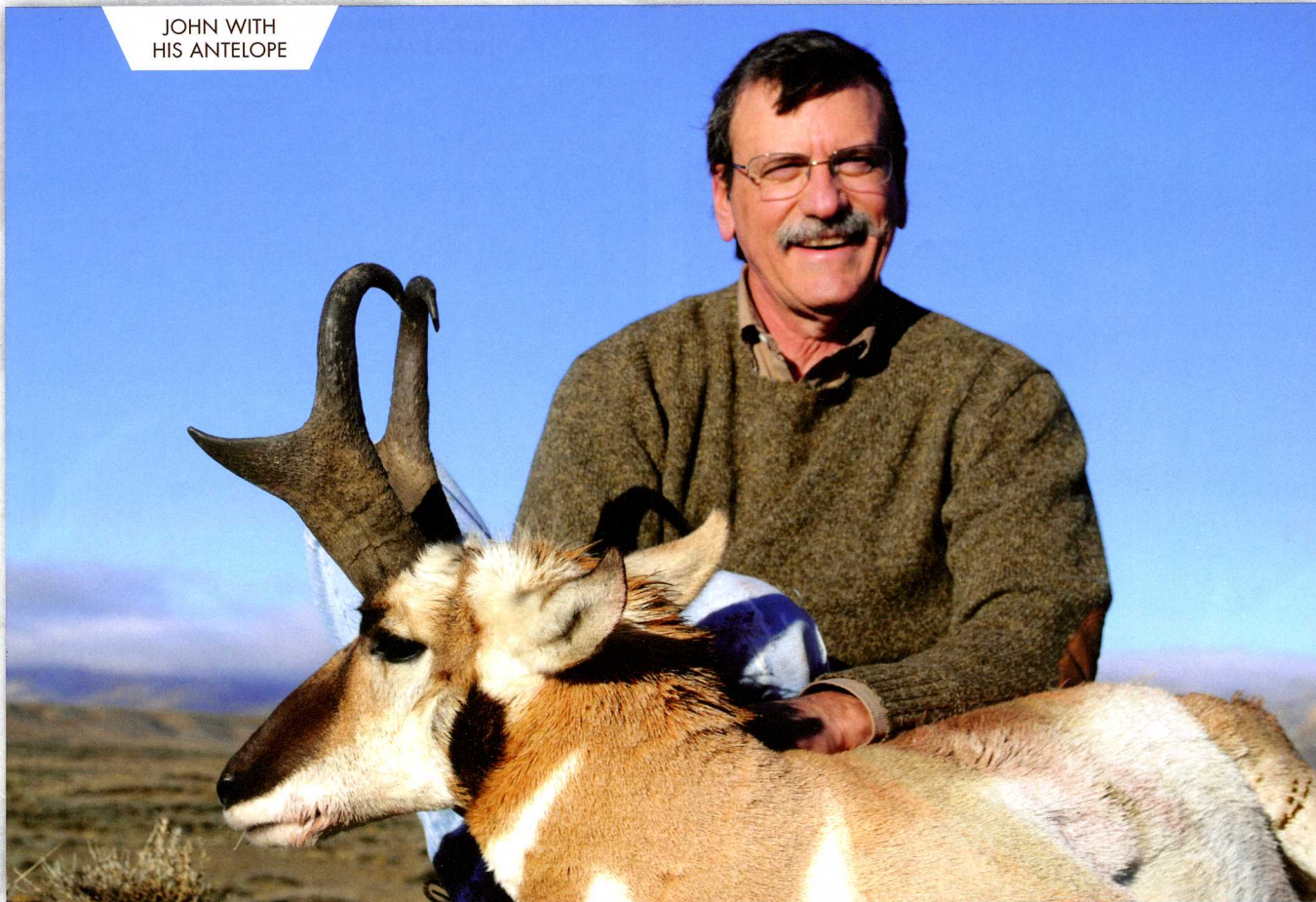
Tony had killed his own buck 2 weeks earlier. It was a perfect September day. A good buck stood on the crest of a smooth ridge far away. His does ran, but he did not. He just stood there. Through the spotting scope, he looked worthy, but he was hard to see so far away. The wind was not a factor. Tony ranged the trees behind him at 1,050 yards. He extended the bipod legs and lay prone. The laser rangefinder read 1,026 yards. Tony dialed the range into his Zeiss 6-24X56 Diavari scope and set the magnification on maximum. With the very slightest adjustment for the wind, he squeezed the trigger and the shot let off. The buck fell.

It took 1/2 hour to get to the buck. As Tony approached, the buck got up and required a second shot. This was a new personal achievement, his longest kill, and on his birthday no less. His previous record was 705 yards. What a fine birthday present it was.

My rifle doesn't have a tactical scope, and I don't have a shooting range to fine tune it for such long range shooting.



JOHN WITH  
HIS ANTELOPE



“Tony saw mud fly where  
the buck had been standing a  
fraction of a second earlier.  
I had missed.”

My longest kill to date was 417 yards. That’s about as far as I feel comfortable shooting without a long-range outfit. On the second day of my hunt in October, we found the Immigrant Buck standing on public land and I set up my rifle, but the range was just too long. By the time Tony got his rifle out of the back of the truck and I set up again, the buck got fidgety, moved, and was now 550 yards away. Just as I was completing my trigger squeeze, he moved. I figured I had him. He’d only just begun to move, and the crosshairs moved to the edge of his body in the direction of motion. Perfect. I didn’t stop the shot, but I should have. By the time the bullet got to him, he had moved completely out of the way. Tony saw mud fly where the buck had been standing a fraction of a second earlier. I had missed.

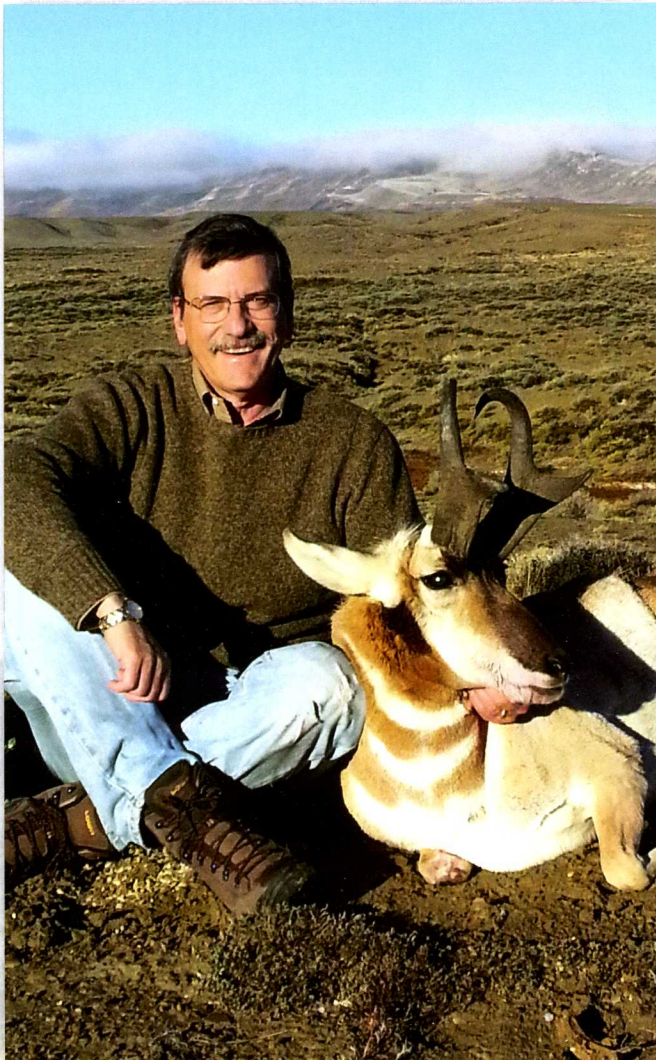
I was disappointed. Tony was disappointed. I had blown it. I thought long and hard that night about what had happened and what I needed to do in the morning. I had wasted too

much time deciding if I really wanted this buck, then more time with my rifle, then even more time with Tony’s rifle. There was too much wasted time. Then I let the shot fly on a buck that was not standing perfectly still. My course was clear as the next day I would hunt with Tony’s rifle, a 7mm Remington Magnum McMillan signature Grimmer rifle. If the range was short, no problem. If the range was long, no wasted time. This was the only reasonable way to hunt skittish bucks in open country – be ready for the long shot with equipment capable of making long kills.

I remembered I had seen this buck the previous year. He was on private land then, so I didn’t spend much time studying him. He had good mass and prongs but appeared short. Later, I took a better buck, so I didn’t think much more about him. Now, the following year, his mass was even better. His long prongs and deep hooks made him compact. He was not tall, and that’s why he hadn’t been shot.

This morning, at first light, we drove right to where we’d last seen the Immigrant Buck. He was there, bedded on public land, in the sun. I set up quickly. Tony dialed the range and asked if I could see enough of the buck to shoot. I could only see the neck and head, so I said, “No.” The buck stood up and moved away. At 400 yards, he stopped. Tony redialed the range on the scope. I made absolutely sure the buck was still and squeezed the





trigger gently. He dropped immediately. No second shot was necessary. I carried the McMillan as I walked out to him, just in case. The 180 grain Berger VLD, propelled by 71.5 grains of Retumbo and chronographed at 3,071 fps, had done everything a hunter could possibly want. I had my trophy.

The Immigrant Buck had very good mass and long prongs. His horns didn't stand tall on his head, but the deep hooks made up for that. After drying, his score was good enough for both Safari Club International and Boone & Crockett, scoring 84 0/8" B&C and 84 4/8" SCI.

I'm glad this buck had been bypassed by so many hunters. Mass is just as critical for a trophy antelope as it is for any North American game. The ability to shoot and kill reliably at long range is another essential factor in successful trophy hunting. You don't absolutely need to be able to kill beyond 1,000 yards for a successful hunt, but depending upon circumstances, you should have equipment available to make reliable kills out to 500 or 600 yards, even 700 yards. It can make the difference between a record book trophy or just another meat buck.



EXCEPTIONAL MASS, PRONGS, & HOOKS MAKE THIS A REAL TROPHY

And the Dead Cow Buck? He was very smart. When pressed on public land, he moved to private. Pressed on private, he moved onto public. We never caught him on public land after that first sighting. He survived the hunting season, but perhaps I'll try for him next year.

And my lessons? These lessons were reinforced upon me – don't feel you have to hunt opening day; make certain your target is absolutely still; be ready for a long shot and don't waste time, have long-range equipment available if you need it; don't underestimate the importance of mass; don't ignore deep hooks; don't become disappointed if you can't find the "big" buck you had heard about, keep looking; don't give up, you may indeed get a second chance; be reasonable, don't expect a World Record every time you go hunting; and remember to take plenty of pictures. If you do all these things, you will have a wonderful trip full of memories. Treasure them and you will find something more satisfying than just the size of your trophy.

Despite my many mistakes, this buck had the critical mass necessary to make him an outstanding trophy. Keep hunting, with all these lessons in mind, and you can do the same. **EF**