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## BOWHUNTING

*Journal*



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GETTING READY FOR YOUR NEXT SEASON

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Jordan grew up in Michigan, hunting whitetails from a treestand. A rural teaching job drew him to the West where he could flourish as a bowhunter, and occasionally pretend he's a cowboy. His wife often accompanies him on his hunts, and has helped pack out more than her share of his animals.

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# RURAL EDUCATION

*Sometimes, teachers who hunt are the ones who wish they had a little more time to get ready before school*

**W**hoever coined the phrase, "Third time's the charm," never spot and stalked public land pronghorn with a bow! My first year hunting speed-goats was 2011, and they very quickly humbled me as an archer. Luck, more than skill, led to my arrow connecting with a buck that fall. By the time the 2012 season rolled around, I'd become a savvier stalker, and my success ratio for closing the distance on any animal had greatly improved.

A couple days into the pronghorn season, I thought I had my tag filled. On my knees, I patiently waited for a bedded buck to stand up from below the curve of the hill so I could sneak an arrow in. Just as I planned, he eventually stood up from his bed at 45 yards, and I sent my arrow on its way. Unfortunately, he ducked and spun ninety degrees before it even reached him. Later that morning, I had another buck duck my arrow at 35 yards.

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Days later, buck number three stood staring through me, broadside, at 40 yards away. He was the biggest pronghorn I'd ever seen: a gray colored hog with heavy horns, and a massive mule deer shaped body. Thinking I had the game figured out, I aimed right below his chest, anticipating he would duck and drop right into the arrow. I was devastated when he didn't flinch until my arrow sailed directly below his chest and shattered on a rock behind him.

The early morning hours of Friday, August 31 found me restlessly tossing and turning, wishing my brain would slow down and succumb to sleep. Rising to the surface above the many thoughts was the reality that my time for bowhunting pronghorn had run out. September's focus would be on elk, and I tried to reflect positively on the great encounters I'd already had. I'd seen a lot of animals, made many stalks, and even photographed a group of fifteen bighorn yews and lambs. Unfortunately, the reflection was marred by the three tag-filling opportunities I'd successfully blown!

Rain pounded the evening before, and it was a clear, full moon night. I knew the conditions were going to be prime for the pronghorn herds to be feeding on the

BLM slopes up to the surrounding private ground at sunrise. By the time my alarm went off, I'd made up my mind to hunt once more, and to do it before work started!

**"In a cloud of dust, I pulled my truck up to my school with barely enough time to change and make last minute preparations for the day's lessons before the bell rang."**

My wife thought I was insane as I pulled on camo and tossed my teaching clothes in the backseat of my pickup. Disgruntled, I recalled I was almost out of gas and the gas station was closed...so I tossed my gas can for the lawn mower in the back. Halfway to my hunting area, I had to pull over and pour the three or four gallons from the can into my pickup.

It was after 6 a.m. and into shooting light as I crept out of the first aspen patch on the hillside. I was surprised to see a group of does to my right within bow range.! They didn't spook, and I watched them file up over the hill. Quickly moving out of sight below, I followed the hill's base until I approached a spot where I thought I'd intercept the group.

Carefully sneaking uphill, nearly up to where I thought I'd see the does, I was startled to see one skylined to my right. Dropping low and moving a few steps farther, I ranged the doe at 50 yards and was about to draw when I noticed the small bunch had grown to around thirty does and fawns. I had a doe tag in my pocket, but with that many does, I thought there had to be a buck with them. I missed my window to shoot as I looked over the group and they moved out of range.

I snuck closer and glanced around for the buck, finally spotting him behind and off to my left, bedded on the next hill, watching my group. Bringing my attention back to the does, I crept forward again, only to have them feed into a position that wasn't able to be stalked from my angle.

The buck was just begging to be stalked, so I crept back down the hill, putting the only available tree between us. Eventually I ranged the tree and ranged the area where the buck was bedded. If I could get to it, I'd be able to peek out from the tree and maybe have a shot.

I slowly moved forward and had nearly closed the gap when the buck popped up and moseyed off his hill onto mine, quartering slightly towards me in the



direction of the does. With the sunrise to my back, I mirrored his movements. Every step we each took decreased the yardage between us.

When he paused, I ranged him and drew back. He began walking again, so I let down and moved forward. I was crouching as low as possible and shuffling forward on one or two knees. When he paused broadside, I ranged him and drew again. My pin was settling behind his shoulder just as he resumed his movements. This time he walked over the crest of the hill.

I tediously snuck closer and when I spotted his head and back again, he was behind a jumble of rocks with a doe and fawn. I drew, but he spun his butt to me. In the next couple minutes I tried twice to get off another shot, but he would either turn or the doe or fawn got in the way at the last moment. I slowly shuffled around, hoping the does would remain oblivious to my presence. The time clock was ticking; I knew they could lock onto my presence at any second.

Eventually, I had a good position. Re-setting my pin, I readied for a shot. Finally, the does fed to the left, the buck turned broadside, and he stepped to the right. I drew my Drenalin once more, sinking into the zone. Predator mode overtook my mind and muscles as I anchored and released. In slow motion, I

watched my arrow arc and drop into the buck.

He ducked and stumbled as I heard a loud "whop!" He stumbled and turned, taking off running and kicking soil six feet into the air. The does scattered as I ran up to the rocks to keep an eye on him and saw him nose-dive to the ground.

The way he acted prompted me to think the hit wasn't as good as I anticipated, so I nocked a second arrow and took a couple steps closer. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw the rest of the herd stare bewildered at me before bolting away. I was about to loose the arrow when the buck's legs stiffened and his chest ceased to expand. It was with great thrill and unnerved feelings that I knelt down by my buck. I'd hunted hard and was proud of the work I'd done: thirteen hunts in two weeks equated to a lot of time glassing, running, stalking, and crawling!

Leaving my bow and running back to my truck, I realized there was less than an hour left before I had to be in my sixth grade classroom! I snapped photos, field dressed, and loaded my buck in record time. A quick post-mortem inspection revealed my arrow had drilled the top off his heart and exited through the other shoulder.

In a cloud of dust, I pulled my truck up to my school with barely enough time to

change and make last minute preparations for the day's lessons before the bell rang. To start off our first period, I led my class outside with a mischievous look on my face and did a little "show and tell." They loved it!

I've developed an immense respect and appreciation for pronghorns in the two seasons I've stalked them with a bow. They are beautiful creatures, unique from any other animal on the planet. Without fail, they almost always walk off in the wrong direction, and have an uncanny ability to utilize the terrain to their advantage. My stalking and shooting skills have greatly improved out of necessity and I look forward to chasing pronghorn with my bow next fall.



#### JORDAN'S EQUIPMENT:

Bow: Mathews Drenalin • Arrows: Easton X7 Eclipse • Broadheads: Thunderhead 125 • Sight: HHA • Rest: Ripcord • Release: Scott • Strings: Winner's Choice • Binoculars: Nikon Monarch 12x42 • Camo: True Timber, KUJU • Other clothing: Icebreaker • Boots: Vasque Trail Runners • Rangefinder: Bushnell Sport 450 • Camera: Olympus Tough 3000

Jordan will receive a Montana Decoy Package for his story. For details, see p. 4.

