

Winter Smorgasbord 2024, Arizona, and New Mexico

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.” Philippians 2:3-4



A stunning evening in the Arizona desert

This past winter we spent a considerable amount of time in Phoenix, Arizona, visiting Robin at college, cheering for her and her team at swimming meets, training in the warm weather...and I bowhunted! Truthfully, we didn't see Robin often, as her schoolwork is demanding – organic chemistry is not for the faint of heart! Regardless, Laurie and I enjoyed extended visits to Arizona in December and again throughout most of January. With our home-office setup and having the flexibility to work remotely, it worked out great.

I held a December 2023 archery deer tag, and both deer and javelina archery tags for January 2024. I had hunted javelina in January 2023, and although I had lots of action, I couldn't quite seal the deal. I made several failed stalks, even missed a few shots, and my tag went unfilled. But I had lots of fun, learned about new hunting areas, and got plenty of fresh air and exercise.



In winter the desert is generally cold at night, but warm (even hot) during the day

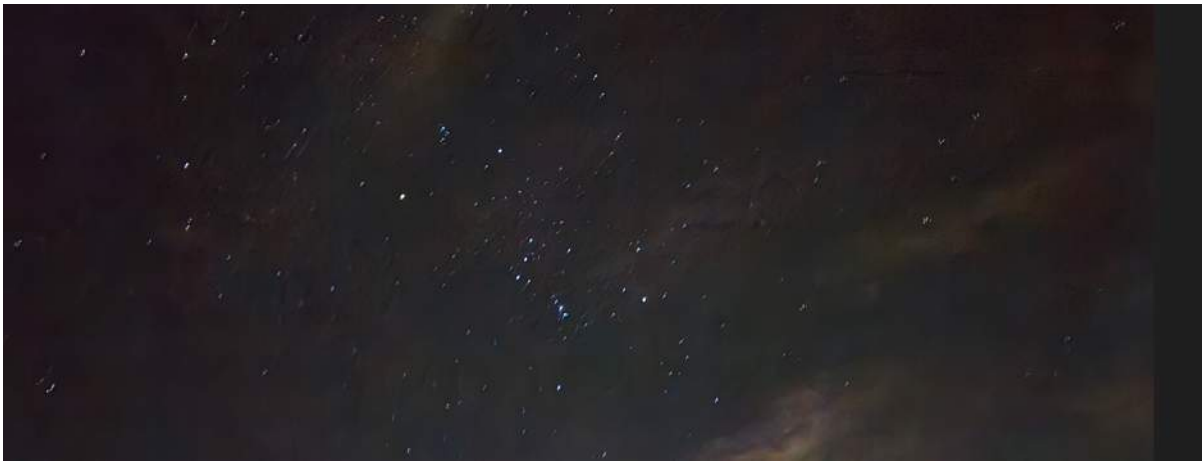
In December I drove, hiked, and mountain biked several different areas attempting to fill my 2023 deer tag. I also sat at waterholes that appeared promising based on tracks. I spotted quite a few does and passed up a very small buck at 34-yards at a waterhole, since we already had plenty of meat in our

freezers. That season ended with another unfilled tag, but plenty of time for thinking, praying and reflection, making memories and a plans for my January 2024 seasons.



Many areas are rocky, in addition to being thorny

Robin had to return to college January 1 for Christmas swim training, so we loaded my hunting gear into her car and drove to Arizona New Year's morning. I intended on hunting a bit that evening but by the time I dropped her at school and got her settled, I didn't reach my area until after dark, so I set up camp, ate dinner, enjoyed the brilliant night sky, and tucked into my sleeping bag.



Capturing stars is challenging and photos pale in comparison to the God's glory in person

The morning was chilly, so I waited until the sun was up to roll out of my bag and gear up for the day, knowing javelina were likely waiting for warmth to begin moving too. I was hunting an area I'd seen javelina the prior year and hopeful I'd locate some again with enough hiking and glassing. I had only seen one doe last year, but with a deer tag in my pocket, bucks were also on the radar. I planted myself atop several vantages and glassed for long periods of time but hadn't spotted anything except moo cows and feral donkeys by late morning.

I spotted a herd of javelina just before noon, feeding on a hillside opposite me. I counted eight, but there may have been a few more, as they filtered through the brush and cactus. Two appeared to be larger than the rest, likely boars, most were a little smaller, likely sows, and a few were immature and

only about half the size of the adults. After double-checking the wind and charting a route, I quickly began to close the distance.

Within about 200 yards I noticed a feral burro downwind of me, but it was far from the javelina, and I didn't put much concern to it. However, after setting down my backpack for the final sneak, the beast began snorting nervously. The donkey then turned tail and clattered away, its hooves rattling like a freight train. I turned back to the javelina only to discover they had become concerned and were trotting the opposite direction of the donkey – rats!

I hustled toward a low saddle where the herd seemed to be headed, but the last one crested while I was still 65-yards away. In case they calmed down on the other side, I slowed and crept over with an arrow nocked. Nothing was visible nearby, but I caught in a movement in the wash below me. The sneaky buggers were still trucking and nearly 100-yards away!

I backed out of sight and ran down into the wash. I was pleasantly surprised to find soft sand and green, soft sprouts along the bottom – my footfalls were nearly silent! I made my way toward where I had last spotted the herd and nocked an arrow as I approached the area. I spotted movement in front of me, two javelina rooting and feeding. I could only see the top of their backs, but they were close and I quickly ranged them to be 21- yards. After dozens of stalks a year ago where I rarely got closer than 40-yards, I doubted my rangefinder, so double- and triple-checked. The breeze was perfect, and it seemed I only had to wait for one to move into the clear and notch my tag.

Suddenly I caught more motion to my left and as an unseen porker emerged from the vegetation. It was even closer, but head-on and obscured by brush. It lifted its nose, testing for scent. The breeze was angling such that the javelina was on the verge of winding me. I carefully drew my bow, hoping it would clear the brush before it spooked. At about 10-yards, the piggie gave a snort and bristled up, puffing its hair in a classic display of concern. Everything was about to unravel, and I was helpless to do anything about it. The javelina huffed and snorted, then swapped ends, and retreated into the brush. I swung back to the original duo as they shuffled and turned, seeking the cause for alarm. One made a fatal mistake and took two steps into a shooting lane and I loosed my arrow – a perfect hit! Instantly the area became mayhem, with javelina darting in all directions, but mine keeled over within sight. Although I had been pretty sure it wasn't one of the big males, I wasn't about to pass up the opportunity. I confirmed it was a mature female (both sexes are legal game, as they are very hard to tell apart). I celebrated the quick success - thank you Lord!



Tag filled on my first day hunting!

I butchered the relatively small, big game animal and easily packed the 15-20 pounds of meat to the car. Later at home I seasoned and grilled one of the backstraps, then sliced it thin and added steamed vegetables for gyros. I should have taken a photo of the final meal, but as you can probably guess from the picture of the meat, it was delicious! We'll get several more meals from this unique and tasty desert dweller.



Javelina backstrap – yum!

Since Laurie wasn't due to join me in Arizona for a few days, I relocated to search for deer. I found a handful of mule deer does in one new area, but no bucks. I discovered a handful of fresh tracks near a natural seep in another area, but recent precipitation had created puddles everywhere and I didn't feel

sitting at water would be productive, so chose to keep checking out new areas. Although I didn't see any bucks over the course of those next few days, it was fun to explore.

It was back to work until the next weekend when I returned to a place I had hunted a year ago. Laurie dropped me off with my mountain bike and trailer and I followed a two track and cattle trails away from civilization. On my way to check a waterhole for tracks, I noted several puddles still remained. Not surprisingly, there were no tracks at the pond. I'd seen several deer in the area before, so tried sitting on a rise farther away from the water, thinking I might at least spot deer moving or feeding even if they didn't need to drink at the pool. However, the afternoon passed without a single deer, although I glassed a pair of bowhunters hiking along another ridge.

The next day I returned to the same general area but spent my time hiking and glassing. Although desert habitat, there were several brushy washes where I thought deer would likely be found. I kept going to get the wind in my favor before stashing my bicycle and slinking down a wash where I had seen tracks. I hopped atop a boulder to glass but realized it would be nearly impossible to spot anything in the thickets. I pressed forward and caught movement. With binos, I picked out a couple does trotting away with a dandy buck in tow! Unfortunately, I had spooked them from their beds by dropping nearly on top of them. I only caught glimpses before they disappeared. Rats - they had been within bow range, if only I had spotted them first instead of bumping them.

I hurried in their direction, keeping to high ground in hopes of relocating them. I'd nearly given up when I glimpsed a doe trot through an opening. With a known location, I angled their way and came to a stop just as the buck caught my movement. We had a stare down until one of the does drew his attention and I was able to ease behind a bush and continue. I popped out to range the distance but for some reason my rangefinder wouldn't cooperate. After several attempts it finally spit out 45-yards. Just as I began to draw my bow, the buck whirled and trotted after one of the does in his harem. Dang it, so close again!

I ended up playing cat and mouse with the buck, losing him, miraculously finding him again and repeating the dance on several occasions. The closest I got after that first encounter was 80-yards over the course of an hour until I eventually lost him for good. As the afternoon waned, I slowly worked my way back to my stashed bike. I didn't see any deer along the way, but although it appeared my hunt was over for the day, I make a point to never give up until shooting light ends. I lashed my bow into the trailer but wore my wrist release and kept my eyes peeled as I rolled along the rough two-track leading to where Laurie had agreed to meet me.

A few minutes later a doe bounded in front of me, and I quickly stopped and grabbed my bow in case a buck was tailing her. At first nothing appeared, but the doe remained only 40-yards away. Eventually a nearly grown fawn made an appearance and trotted to join her, which was why she held tight despite knowing I was present. Suddenly another deer charged down the hill toward them, a small fork-horned buck. I advanced a few steps in case a bigger buck showed, but the threesome trotted away from me. Yet a little more action before the day finished!

I re-lashed my bow and continued rolling as the sky continued to darken. As I came around a corner, I glimpsed half a dozen shapes in a bowl beside the road and immediately realized they were deer. I hadn't seen any headgear, but good odds the group contained a buck, so I rolled another 50-yards before quietly stopping and readying my bow. I tiptoed back up the road and peered around a large bush that provided cover. A group of does browsed below me at close range. One deer with a bigger body raised its head, revealing enough antler that I drew my bow. When the buck took a step forward, I buried my

arrow behind his front leg, and he charged into the brush - thank you Lord! The herd scattered, and I waited several minutes before checking for blood. It had come together so quickly I didn't have time to use my rangefinder, but I knew he was close and used my 30-yard pin. He ended up being about 25-yards from me, but I had seen the impact and was confident in my shot. I found good blood right where he had been standing, and solid spray along his death run. I texted Laurie and apologized I'd be late due to the butchering task before me, then resumed trailing.

Despite crimson spray and heavy hoofprints in the sand, I lost the sign where the buck had charged through some tall grass, which made hoofprints and blood spatter difficult to see in the fading light. I returned to my bike for a headlamp before continuing my search. The shadows from the grass made the evidence even more difficult to see and I became baffled. I pushed forward along a logical route, circled, backtracked and retraced the trail to the point I had lost it, all to no avail. Finally, I went back to my bike to retrieve my "cheater" reading glasses and stooped so my face nearly touched the ground at the last blood spatter. I scoured the area until I turned up one spot 90-degrees from its direction of travel – a hah! I pressed ahead along this new route and voila, my buck was stone dead only 20-yards farther! In total he had sprinted about 80-yards, but those last few were challenging and took me much longer than it should have.

I snapped photos and butchered my trophy. I was able to load all the meat into my trailer, fill my backpack with hunting gear and extra clothes, and then lash the head and my bow on top...and still ride! I met my mildly irritated wife at the trailhead nearly 2-hours late, but she forgave me after noting my enthusiasm and knowing we had more delicious meat for the household – at least I think she forgave me LOL. I also comforted her that I my hunting was over, and I wouldn't be out and about chasing deer...until next year, that is!



Praise God!

Laurie was enjoying the weather in Phoenix so much we decided to stay the entire month of January instead of heading home for about a week during the middle. During that timeframe I had promised to help a friend on his Barbary sheep hunt in New Mexico, so that meant I'd have a 10-hour drive instead

of four, but how could I renege after the Lord had provided double success just a week apart? Thanks to His blessing I had vacation to spare, so loaded my gear, borrowed Robin's car, and hit the road for New Mexico early the following Friday.

All I had was a waypoint where my buddy Brandon intended to camp and a text message "we won't have cell service there, so if that pull out is already taken, I'll continue down the road until I can find a place to park the trailer." That note sounded like the beginning of an adventure to me!

I had charted likely roads to Brandon's campsite and by the time I left pavement it was dark. Before losing service, I texted Brandon's wife everything was fine, and I was on track to meet Brandon soon. Although I missed my truck's LED light bars and off-road suspension, Robin's Subaru performed admirably, even when I inadvertently took a side road that became "dicey". Later in the hunt when we found ourselves on the same road in Brandon's UTV, he quipped "Man, I can't believe you took a car through here!" Well, that's how I roll, and Robin's car was none the worse for wear, although it required a lot of finesse to avoid tall rocks and deep potholes.

When I finally approached Brandon's spot, I discovered a tent city, then the next pullout held a huge trailer and several trucks that weren't his. Third time was a charm, but it was apparent we'd have hunting competition. We greeted each other warmly as it had been too long since we shared hunting camp. Brandon apologized for "making" me drive so far to join him, to which I replied I hadn't come all this way for an unsuccessful hunt.

We ate dinner and discussed strategy and plans for opening day, then organized backpacks and gear before lights out. Although I love hunting solo at times, there is something special about sharing camp with a good friend and brother in Christ. Brandon was one of the first hunters I met after moving to New Mexico and little did we know back then we'd become lifelong friends. Even though we've only hunted together a handful of times, we live vicariously through each other's adventures and Brandon is perhaps my biggest supporter. He's followed my highs and lows over the years and has always been the first to encourage me when things look bleak and celebrate with me when things go well. I'm truly blessed by his friendship.

The following morning, we bundled up and took to the hills in Brandon's trusty (and dusty) UTV. I'd never traveled as much in anything but an enclosed truck and in fact may still be spitting dust! We drove for miles, occasionally stopping to glass and hike to vantage points to scour the desert. Everywhere we went, we spotted or crossed paths with hunters doing the same thing. Lots of them. It became discouraging knowing we were looking over the same ground dozens of others already had. Needless to say, we didn't spot a sheep all morning. Or afternoon. Early evening found us at the end of a rugged two track from which another UTV passed us coming out. The day was coming to an end, and we were a couple hours' drive from camp. But we hadn't lost hope. I eyed the spine of the ridge that fell away from us. "How crazy would it be to take a walk down there?" Brandon replied, "Let's do it!" so quickly, I knew it had been on his mind too. He announced since we both had a gut feeling, we had better follow through.

We shouldered our backpacks and began hiking. Within a quarter mile we found sheep droppings, and although they were old and dry, it was the first sign we'd discovered all day, which buoyed our spirits. We hiked and glassed for half an hour before some marks in the sandy soil caught my eye. Fresh tracks! And although they *could* be deer, my gut told me they were Barbary. We studied the sign where it appeared animals had bedded and rolled in the dusty soil. We moved another 50-yards and suddenly our quarry erupted from the brush before us! A group of ewes burst downhill and paused to look back

from less than 100-yards. Brandon readied his rifle immediately, but the small herd contained no rams. I scanned the area, hoping to turn one up, but it was not meant to be so early in the hunt. Still, we were excited to find animals and continued after they meandered away.

With renewed enthusiasm, we sat down to glass at the next likely vantage, where Brandon turned up an immature sheep and then a ewe with a limp, which descended into some nasty cliffs to bed despite its handicap. Had it been a ram, we could have easily relocated for a close-range cross-canyon shot. Things were certainly improving!

We continued hiking and glassing until nearly reaching the flats at the base of the range, without spotting anything else. Now it was time to retrace our steps up, up, and up even more to the UTV. I kept my head on a swivel, believing our day not yet over. Suddenly I spotted a sheep silhouetted on the skyline. In Alaska, Dad taught me how to gauge the subtle stance and body language of Dall sheep rams from far off years ago, and it has served me to this day. I can't fully explain, but I knew this one was a ram. I pointed it out to Brandon and quickly got binoculars onto my tripod. Certain it was bigger than the ewes, I confirmed it wasn't what we were looking for. Still, there were likely to be others.

We eased behind some rocks and cut the distance. From our new vantage, we spotted a pair of rams before they dropped out of sight into the saddle where we had seen the fresh tracks and dusting marks. We kept climbing until only one rocky knob separated us from where the rams had disappeared. I crawled forward to peek and motioned Brandon to join me. Before us were those three plus another handful. We studied each, but the herd included no big rams: only the three smallish rams, a handful of ewes and some immature animals. But it was a perfect setup. They grazed about 150-yards away from us without a care. It was gratifying to observe them acting naturally and a great way to wrap up the day as the sun set and sky began to dim. We retreated and detoured around them, vowing to return the following day.



Lots and lots of country



Where are those sheep?!

We were tired, dusty, cold, dusty, dusty, and dusty by the time we got back to the trailer. But it had been an amazing day! The hot shower was well worth Brandon towing his trailer. Over dinner, we charted another way to access the promising area we'd found.

The next morning found us bumping along the road I had previously driven Robin's Subaru, although we took a side spur that angled toward the terrain where we'd seen all the sheep the day before. Perhaps it was because we had seen Barbary there firsthand, but everywhere we looked appeared to be perfect sheep country! Soon the two-track petered out, so we shouldered our backpacks and began climbing. Despite the promising scenery, we failed to spot any sheep until late morning when Brandon spied some way off. We studied them for quite some time before deciding they were all ewes, but they were in the general direction we were headed, so we kept tabs on them as we continued. More appeared as we got closer, so we sat and took our time studying them. Literally each time we couldn't imagine any more appearing, another handful would come over the saddle, until there were nearly 30 sheep! It was incredible even though none were rams. But with that many animals, rams must be around somewhere.

We continued past the herd on an adjacent ridge, while they dropped to the bottom of a gnarly arroyo to feed. We continued to find old droppings, tracks in dried mud, and occasional fresh tracks, so it seemed only a matter of time before we'd spot more.

As we approached one deep canyon, I scanned the opposite slope with my binoculars. It looked "sheepy", but I failed to turn up anything. As we cautiously approached the rim to sit and glass, Brandon sang out "Sheep!" Sure enough, a group of four solid rams appeared almost exactly where I had just scanned. One had spooked and was making a beeline to the top of the ridge, while two others stood at high alert and the last one fed, seemingly oblivious. We immediately confirmed these rams were "shooters", so I attempted to identify the biggest while Brandon laid prone with his rifle. I ranged the top of the ridge to be 400-yards and identified the middle two rams as the best. But we couldn't catch a break as the first ram didn't hesitate at the top, but bailed right over, and the remaining three began trotting uphill. I kept tabs on the biggest as they often changed positions, but they never provided a good shot. Whenever one began to slow, another would continue zigzagging steadily, and anytime they paused, they were either at odd angles or obscured by brush or boulders. The big one stopped just over the ridgeline with only the top of his back visible, and then they were gone. Dang it - if only I'd spotted them on my first scan, we would have been in business!

We quickly regrouped and struck out for a saddle that would take us to the next rise in hopes of getting on the rams again. It seemed to take forever, but we finally peered into the gorge they had descended. I looked vainly on the huge hillside, but Brandon spied them in the very bottom, well out of range and still moving away into some rocky cliffs. They paused and watched their back trail, then disappeared. We knew it would be nearly impossible to catch them, and while they were nice rams, none were the caliber dreams are made of, so it seemed better to continue checking out new country in hopes of locating a real whopper.

At the top of the next ridge, we were paranoid about spooking unseen animals, so picked everything apart several times before easing to the edge of the drop-off to glass. We didn't see anything for quite a while, until Brandon caught movement a LONG way off. I still don't know how he managed to spot them, but about six animals shifted in and out of view about a mile away. Although we only caught glimpses, we were confident none were big rams. I kept scanning the area for others, and eventually spotted two hunters at the top of a ridge closer to the sheep, but still far out of range. Bummer, as we believed nobody else was in the area and had no idea where they'd come from. As I watched, one pointed toward the sheep below. Although Brandon doubted they had a clear view to the sheep, I felt they could see down a different drainage from their position. So even if we reached the herd, these other guys were about to mess up the opportunity. We continued to keep tabs on the sheep and hunters, while glassing for other animals in the opposite direction. Eventually one guy began descending. We lost sight of him, but a shot echoed up the canyon. The sheep trotted away, and the hunter returned to his buddy who had remained on the ridge. It was surely a miss due to extreme distance, but a ridiculous attempt just the same.

Failing to turn up any more sheep, we had one last bit of excitement when we kicked up four javelina as we hiked to the UTV. I had considered picking up a tag "just in case" but hadn't gotten around to it mainly because I didn't feel like lugging my bow around all day just to sidetrack Brandon's hunt to chase javelina. It would have been difficult to get within archery range of those piggies anyway, so we just chuckled and watched them scramble away. We chalked the day up as another huge success, having spotted more sheep than we had in many years, and planned to return again the next morning.

After a night of recovery, the amazing weather we'd been blessed with had taken a turn for the worse, with scattered clouds and blustery winds from the get-go. Wind is the bane of sheep hunting and this time of year it's common. Sheep tend to move less and it's harder to hold binoculars steady, so finding them becomes even more challenging than it already is.

We came up empty for most of the day until I finally spotted rams on a distant hillside. They were totally unapproachable, with a commanding view and no nearby cover. All we could do was watch them meander and feed, hoping to catch a break. We surmised it was the same band despite being well over a mile from where we had lost them the day before. While observing them, I turned up some ewes below in a narrow gully feeding on yucca and cactus. The ewes eventually disappeared while the rams bedded. After waiting well over an hour, we decided our time would be better spent backing out and either evaluating options to close the distance or finding others in a more stalkable location. We did our best to sneak away when cloud cover cast us into shadow, but I suspect the sharp-eyed critters caught us moving, and to make matters worse, when we dropped over the ridgetop behind us, we spooked the ewes that had disappeared earlier. Nearly two dozen animals charged up the far slope, and although no rams were with them, I suspected we had blown any chance at the original rams because they were in position to see the ewes fleeing. Sure enough, when we shifted to look for the rams, they were gone. Brandon picked them up trotting parallel to the route of the ewes and they quickly topped over the next

ridge. Brandon had a hunch we could take a saddle that would put us on the other side to intercept the rams if they tried to join the ewes, so off we trotted. Or at least as much of a trot as one can on loose, rocky footing.

When we crested the adjacent ridge, it was time to slow down and relocate the sheep, which is always a balancing act. Too slow and the sheep might be long gone; too fast and we could blow them out before even seeing them. We pressed ahead, dropping elevation, and hoping we hadn't missed them. Suddenly Brandon announced the ewes were at the bottom of the ravine!

Some began to climb the opposite cliff face and I quickly ranged the distance at 320-yards, then scanned the herd for rams. As Brandon glassed for the rams in the direction the ewes had come from, I identified a few suspicious animals in the group. "Brandon, get on your rifle, I'm pretty sure there's a ram in the herd!" While he scrambled to lay prone and dial in his scope, I confirmed at least one good ram near the tail end of the herd, which I pointed out. "He just turned left; now he stopped in front of that yucca; he's feeding on that oak brush now." Brandon whispered, "What do you think?" I replied it was every bit as big as the ones he had been itching to shoot an hour ago, so don't second guess things now. BOOM! The ram went down like he'd been hit by an anvil! Yes! We'd done it –our effort and teamwork had paid off! The rest of the herd continued climbing and disappeared over the top, but Brandon's ram was down for good. It was a time to be savored as we made our way down the steep hillside to approach his sheep. It ended up being Brandon's best ram to date, horns measuring 25" in length, which cemented our decision to take him. Again, thank you, Lord!



Brandon's best ram to date

It was a treasured opportunity for trophy photos, reliving the stalk, and sharing tales as we butchered and loaded our packs. Absolutely the best of times. After finishing, Brandon consulted his GPS and confidently announced we could follow our drainage, then divert into another and reach the UTV without any major climbing. It sounded too good to be true but turned out to be a blessing on top of blessing – certainly the easiest pack either of us had ever had with a Barbary – thank you, Lord...again!



Moonrise over the ridge at Brandon's sheep kill site – it was beautiful!

After yet another successful hunt, I reported to my dad I was on a roll and expected good things for his upcoming oryx hunt. Soon he and my sister arrived in Albuquerque, as Jill wanted to help and join the fun. They arrived the day before season and the forecast was marginal, with on and off frozen mix for the first several days. We decided to spend the first day organizing gear and loading my truck, and then keep tabs on the weather to determine when to head out.

On opening morning, the sun was bright, the sky blue, and it was nearly 90-degrees warmer than when they left home (-20degrees!). We walked the dogs and lamented the amazing conditions despite snow and rain to arrive the following day. It didn't make much sense to head out for miserable camping when we had plenty of time to hunt.

As we finished up our walk, I tossed out whether it was worth packing lunches for a day trip to stretch our legs, get some fresh air and work the kinks out. Within minutes of returning home, dad appeared fully decked out in hunting gear – apparently, we'd be taking a drive!

We hurriedly packed lunches, snacks, water, backpacks, and other gear. I initially assumed Dad would use my rifle, since it's very similar to his and Jill's back home, but I had him check Robin's 6.5 Creedmoor and he decided it fit him better.

We hit the road for a place on my radar I'd scouted. I didn't consider it a priority spot, but it was close enough for a day trip and I'd seen enough sign to be promising. The drive allowed us to catch up, discuss hunting strategy, and test out new suspension improvements and tires on my trusty steed.

Along the way Jill spotted some pronghorn, which got our hearts pumping until we identified them. Although it's always fun to see animals even if they aren't on the menu. As we reached my area, I stopped to open a gate. "Guys, hop out and take a look...these are oryx tracks!" I initially assumed cattle had tromped across the road, but it appeared we were in the right place at the right time.

A little farther along, I suggested we stop and climb a small rise to glass. Tracks crisscrossed in every direction, both old and fresh, so I mentioned to dad we should probably have a rifle handy. Jill trotted back to the truck while I advanced to check the view over the back side of the hill. By the time I returned, dad had spotted oryx about half a mile away filtering in and out of sight in the vegetation and deceptively

rolling terrain. As we watched and theorized a plan of attack, dad spotted more even closer, perhaps about 500-yards away!

We didn't have a rangefinder and weren't prepared like we should have been, so I hustled back to the truck to gear up for a stalk, but the wind was sketchy, and we think the closest animals caught our/my scent because Jill watched them whirl and trot off. Rooky mistakes on all counts!

We trudged back to the truck and drove in the general direction they had gone. Jill and I walked up another rise to glass. We spotted two oryx far away, which would have been challenging to relocate with no landmarks, then we spotted others, only about ½ mile away. As we pondered ways to approach, dad came up beside us. He suggested we simply work our way down a dry wash and use vegetation as landmarks as best we could. We agreed his plan was worth a try and dropped elevation to stalk, losing sight of the animals almost immediately.

We soon believed we had reached their location but couldn't be sure whether it was the right place, or if they had moved. We kept sneaking along until Jill glimpsed motion ahead. She was certain it had been immature "brownies"; younger animals that would be near the adults.

We scooted ahead and came to a sharp arroyo cut about five-feet deep by five-feet wide and impossible to cross. We detoured upstream and until we could drop in where the bank had collapsed. I had a hunch it would be worthwhile to follow it downstream. I hustled down beyond where we had first intercepted the arroyo and was able to peek over the lip to see some oryx within range, although obscured by yucca, tall grass, and mixed vegetation. I retreated for dad and Jill, and we sneaked back down the arroyo. The soft sand in the bottom kept us silent, and the tall banks allowed us to walk upright without being seen. The only problem was dad is shorter than me, so it was challenging for him to see out of the arroyo!

Before we could get dad set up, the adult animals moved past our shooting lane and only young animals remained, so we repositioned in hopes of catching the group crossing another opening. While I tried to get shooting sticks in place, Jill saw a couple larger animals slip past. I finally had dad set up, but he was balancing on his tiptoes to see over the lip of the arroyo.

Two adult cows fed into his shooting lane. One stared toward us, although I couldn't tell whether we'd been spotted, or she was just studying her surroundings. Although we knew there were bigger animals in the group, it seemed foolish to look a gift horse in the mouth as they were only about 100-yards away (I didn't even range them), so I encouraged dad to shoot if one turned broadside.

Boom! One whirled and slammed to the ground! We looked at each other like "did that really just happen?" as the others scattered.

Dad's was a mature cow, and although both horns were broken from fighting or whatever, the rings at the bottom proved its age and the bases were big for a female. To top it off, we were able to drive on a two-track within 150-yards of the kill site, so packing out that oryx was the easiest I've ever done! Praise God! We had friends and family praying for a successful hunt, and they must have been praying really hard, because things couldn't have worked out any better! We texted Laurie and my hunting buddy Brian that we were already headed home with a cooler full of meat and shocked them both.



Another team success, what an amazing blessing!



Our spare time allowed me to get the skull cleaned for dad to take home on the plane

What an incredible winter season - four very different species within four weeks! Although half of the hunts weren't my own, they were every bit as memorable and enjoyable. In some respects, helping others can be even more meaningful because it turns one's focus away from self and shifts it to serving and helping others. It's a healthy perspective, often lacking in society today. I encourage each of you to reach out and help others in the upcoming year, no matter what the activity may be. The shared memories you build with others will remain with you for the rest of your life.