

An other visit to Rancho El Carbón

COL. JOHN ROUSH / January 15, 2014



John Roush recalls fascinating experiences from an interesting life. An octogenarian, he is a retired Army Colonel who was an infantry platoon leader in Europe during World War II, inducted into the Infantry OCS Hall of Fame at Fort Benning, Georgia. His last assignment was that of a Brigade Commander. A Fellow of The Explorers Club, he has traveled extensively in remote parts of the world. Holding a doctorate in Business Administration, he served as a management consultant. A big game hunter and conservationist, he has many entries of trophies within the record books, and his extensive collection of wildlife photographs has been donated to the University of California.

Pleasant memories of previous trips prompted my return to Rancho El Carbon. From the grand view from the stone masonry lodge on top of a prominent ridge I contemplated the fine bucks that roamed the great Sonora Desert which spread out below. It would be a challenge to find one of the trophy bucks hidden amid the vast collection of cover. The accumulated palo verde, ocotillo, saguaro, trees and shrubs made it difficult to see wildlife, for the recent rains had turned the desert green. It was remarkable how many birds we were seeing, much more than on previous trips. Their abundance signified a resurgence of wildlife in the desert, an auspicious sign for the commencement of the hunt.

In each of my four or five previous trips I have shot a buck large enough to score adequately for entry into the



SCI record book. To have that kind of success encourages one to start another search. A significant number of the mule deer bucks of the desert carry antlers far larger than what we see in California.

The first morning of the January 2014 hunt found me trying to gain a sight picture in early dawn's dim light on a fine buck two hundred yards away. However, the rifle was too short for me, a six foot man, and the buck walked before I was comfortable with a sight picture. Ah well, my wife had told me:

"Don't shoot the first one you see!" I thought: "Maybe I'll see a larger one." That day we drove slowly many miles over dirt tracks through a vast area of desert without seeing any deer with antlers as large as the one I allowed to escape.

The second morning we had not gone far, in the earliest discernable light, when we saw a deer walking,



two hundred yards away. We spotted him through the cover by virtue of his high head carrying a spectacularly wide rack of antlers. I was seated on a high platform mounted to the roof of the truck and I thought I could look down into the enveloping cover. Yet most of the buck was masked and the light was too little to permit evaluation of the antlers. In a few seconds he would be gone. So I took the shot and he then disappeared. Scrambling down, the guide raced ahead of me.

Delighted to find a red splotch on the ground, I hastened forward. I was relieved to hear Poncho acclaim success. We found the fine buck had only gone about forty yards. I was pleased with the accomplishment, yet distressed to find that two antler tines had been broken off from fighting. It scored $165 \frac{4}{8}$ yet would have been $172 \frac{4}{8}$. It weighed 240 pounds, a big deer with a thirty-one inch



Agustin Saenz with his two bucks



spread of antlers. All mule deer carrying antlers wider than thirty inches are considered outstanding trophy animals.

I had the pleasure of hunting with three fine gentlemen from the suburbs of Mexico City. Augustin Saenz shot a nice buck with a narrower, but taller rack the same morning that I scored as $174 \frac{2}{8}$. Several days later, he

Col. Roush with his trophy





Carlos Monroy with his buck



Francisco Usobiaga with his trophy

bagged another slightly larger that had three additional non-typical tines that were not included in the total score.

I was with Carlos A. Monroy in a different section of the ranch when he took a nice typical mule deer that scored 159 4/8. There was another buck running with that one and several does, but I did not endeavor to shoot it for I did not want to interfere with Carlos' attempt. Besides, I didn't believe it would score better than the one I had taken.

The last morning the fourth member of our group, Francisco Usobiaga, also shot a nice buck with a similar conventional, symmetrical rack of antlers. It scored similarly to that of Carlos. All five bucks qualified for entry into the SCI record books.

Two of the Mexican gentlemen tried originally to bag a deer with archery equipment. Francisco missed one yet hit another in the shoulder that got away despite our extensive search. It was believed that the wound was not severe, and that the animal would recover.

The area had substantial rain prior to our visit, and the desert really looked green. There was extensive fresh green growth that inhibited our ability to sight the game despite our high seats atop the trucks. When we did have a sighting, the viewings were intermittent and brief. One had to be extremely alert and quick to get into action. Shooting opportunities were extremely short, a matter of seconds. I saw about 55 deer during the week, of which about 16 were bucks. Most of those bucks seen by me carried antlers large enough to qualify for entry within the SCI record book.

I had truly endeavored to be discriminating on this hunt, seeking an outstanding trophy. My wife had told me:



"Don't shoot the first one you see!" Actually, the first one I did see was the best that I saw on the entire trip. That sighting was in the vague light of dawn, and I was having difficulty gaining a sight picture for the rifle stock was too short for me. Fortunately, our host German Rivas found an extension to add to the rifle he had loaned me that helped me to proceed. It was an enjoyable, challenging trip.

