

# High Prairie Outfitters

## FEATURED OUTFITTER OF THE YEAR



## Archery Antelope Hunting With The Best!

By Dan Wennerlind

As my father and I pulled into the driveway of the High Prairie Lodge and Outfitters located just outside of Deadwood, South Dakota, I could already tell we were in for a real treat. Outfitter Dave Ciani greeted us with a smile and a handshake and as he showed us to our rooms, in his restored 1800 stone guest house, the smell of wife Teri's incredible roast beef dinner filled the air. I already knew this "All Inclusive Archery Antelope Hunt" was going to be everything that I had expected and more even before it started. As gourmet chef Teri Ciani proceeded to put the finishing touches on our fabulous dinner, we had a chance to unload our equipment and zing a couple arrows into Dave's archery range before dark to make sure we were ready for the morning hunt.

At dinner, Dave told us what we could expect during the next three days. He said that he had several watering holes which had been holding up to 40 antelope in each and that we were definitely going to see some in-your-face action throughout the hunt. He then explained that in an attempt to avoid alarming the resident animals, we would be hunting out of permanent blinds already set up on the two most productive watering holes instead of the double bull archery blinds he usually uses. As we finished our dinner and Teri served us up some of her homemade chocolate cake and ice cream for desert, Dave told us to get some sleep as we would need to be ready to leave at 4:00 am sharp. As tired as I was from the long drive, that night sleep was a little hard to come by.

The next day the weather was perfect. We had clear skies and a nice breeze with temps expected in the high 80's; just what the doctor ordered. As we pulled up to the first blind, Dave dropped me off with my lunch, radio and equipment and said that we would be checking in on the radio every hour since he would be hunting with my father today. Well it didn't take long after sunrise to see my first buck. He wasn't quite ready for a drink yet and kept moving up the hillside about 100 yards out. Throughout the morning, I was entertained by numerous antelope moving up and down the hillside in front of me and several jackrabbits playing within yards of my blind. Then within the blink of an eye, two does came up over the dike for a drink. They were no more than 15 yards away and didn't have a clue that I was there. Even though my tag was good for either sex, at that moment I decided to hold out for one of the nice bucks I had been watching up on the hill. For the next five hours, the only thing I shot was photos of over 30 antelope that came and went from my watering hole offering very tempting opportunities to harvest my first antelope. All along I kept my eye on one mature buck who I estimated to be around 15" tall, napping on the hill about 300 yards out. Then around 2:00 in the afternoon it happened, as two young bucks were prancing around in front of me, it was just too much for the old buck to take and he came charging down to set them straight, giving me a clean thirty yard shot. Unfortunately I had estimated him a little farther out than that and sent my arrow right over his back. Although I lost round one, I was that much more excited for the next challenge awaiting me tomorrow.

That evening as we enjoyed another fabulous home cooked meal, we shared our war stories of the day and I heard about the several antelope that had visited my father and Dave. Then Dave gave us the option of where we wanted to hunt the

next morning and it was a no brainer for me. My father, however, chose a new watering hole, one that they had scouted out later that afternoon.

Day two started off the same way and I had several antelope and mule deer visit me right off the bat. But after that close encounter with the big boy the day before, I was not settling for anything less. My father fared better in his new spot as a nice 11" buck came into him mid morning. He was able to drop an arrow right through the sweet spot and take his very first antelope with his crossbow. After getting the buck into the butcher ASAP, we reconvened and decided to head back to camp for a little R and R.

After we unpacked, Dave gave me a guided tour of his property which consists of over 600 acres of private land in the heart of the Black Hills, specifically managed for wildlife. He has spent countless hours and dollars into food plots and ponds for his wildlife. He also showed me 20 ladder stands that he has strategically placed throughout the property for every hunting situation. This did not even include the 2000+ acres he has leased directly adjacent to his property. During our tour, I saw over twenty whitetails and two flocks of Merriam's with several monster gobblers feeding peacefully. We were not, however, able to find the two Pope and Young whitetail bucks that have taken up residence on Dave's property. I asked Dave how he gained the expertise to take on such a project himself. He told me that with his degree and extensive background in wildlife management and some aid from the state game and fish department, he was able to rejuvenate the land to its natural state and then some.

Being a die hard waterfowler, my favorite part of the tour was Dave's pole shed. From his 20' enclosed trailer packed to the gills with full body goose decoys, flying snow goose decoys and a brand new four wheeler, to his 20' deep water duck boat which can handle anything this side of the Pacific, it was quite a display. Dave has quite an array of the best waterfowl hunting equipment available on the market today, offering set ups for every situation

I had to ask Dave how he found time to run another business aside from his outfitting. With the extensive amount of time and energy he devotes to every single aspect of his guided hunts, his schedule must be challenging. Dave's hunts include; Big Game in South Dakota and Nebraska, Waterfowl in Canada, South Dakota and Nebraska, Upland Birds in Canada and South Dakota and Turkeys in the Black Hills. Dave told me that because he is a smaller outfitter and he only caters to a select few hunters each year, he can make arrangements to customize all of his hunts to the exact specifications of each and every customer.

Our last night must have been special because Teri presented us with a turkey dinner that rivaled my mother's best Thanksgiving Day feast. As we listened to the thunder roll in on our third night, I could only hope for a chance at another nice buck with the weather change. In any event, my mind was made up that High Prairie Outfitters was definably the kind of outfitter that we strive to promote at HuntTheNorth.com and it was my pleasure to present Dave Ciani with our most prestigious award as HuntTheNorth's 2006 Outfitter Of The Year. As my father and I drove home the next day with his beautiful buck, I knew that I would definitely be back next year for another crack at the one that got away!

**FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT: Dave Ciani at High Prairie Outfitters**  
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