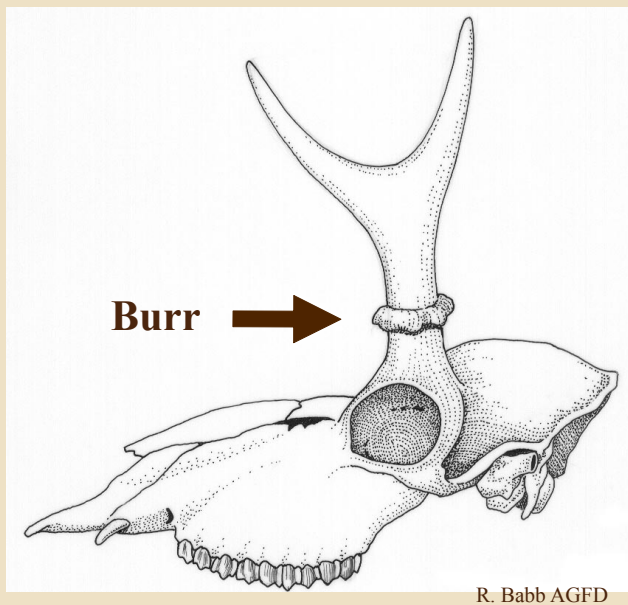


MERYCODUS: THE PRIMITIVE PRONGHORN

The earliest pronghorn species in North America lived between 15 and 19 million years ago. They were small, delicate creatures with long, graceful legs and were swift runners. These earliest pronghorns are called Merycodonts, meaning “ruminant toothed” in reference to the form of their teeth.



Among living animals, they most resemble some of the smaller forest antelopes of Africa, although they are not closely related. They also resemble some of the smaller, solitary members of the deer family, which suggest that they might also have been solitary animals. Their ability to

run suggest that they were adapted to the grasslands which were rapidly spreading throughout North America at the time they lived.

The early pronghorns all have paired branching horns located above their eyes. Some of the horncores show a “burr” similar to that on deer antlers, but there is no evidence that the horns were ever shed. Instead, the horns were covered with skin, which dried up and was shed annually. The burr marks the point of detachment of the cast-off skin. Some horns show as many as 4 burrs.

