SPORTS

A tale of turkey and hogs
By Luke Clayton
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There are few things that I enjoy more than hunting turkeys in the spring when the landscape is coming to life in many hues of green and the sun’s warming rays once again informs Mother Nature that it’s time for all her creatures to go about the task of procreation.

Crappie, bass and many other fish species are moving shallow to spawn and turkey hens have nesting on their minds. Gobblers become love struck and even those wary old longbeards that usually hang back in the brush can be enticed within shotgun or bow range by a few plaintive hen yelps on an old box call, at least sometimes they can!

I had the distinct privilege this past week of spending a couple of days camping, hunting and cooking on one of my favorite places with a couple of great friends. Did you ever meet someone that you became instant friends with and you felt that you had known your entire life? Well that was the case last year when I met Randy Douglas, the manager of the Dale River Ranch, situated in Palo Pinto County right on the banks of the Brazos River.

Last fall, I bow-hunted the ranch on several occasions for deer and hogs. I would go up for a quick one or two day hunt and set up a Spartan tent camp along a remote, grassy bend of the river. Randy and I got to know each other setting around the camp enjoying an evening meal of fried fish, wild hog fajitas or whatever we had in our freezers from past outdoor excursions.

One these hunts, I got a good idea of the great number of turkeys that range this rugged landscape situated on the edge of the Palo Pinto Mountains. These aren’t mountains like we hunt in Colorado each fall for elk and bear, but climb one of them a time or two and I’m betting you will agree that these rises in elevation caused by volcanic action eons ago truly deserve the title
'mountains'.

Dale River Ranch is mostly gently rolling land with a few abrupt elevation drops but from the higher elevations on the ranch, the distant mountain range strikes and awesome vista.

Another of my long time friends, Mark Balette joined us for this hunt. Mark and I have hunted together for the past couple of decades and have many fond memories of past hunts to reflect upon. Mark owns a hunting ranch down near Trinity in East Texas (www.easttexasexotics.com) and brought some Axis deer backstrap steaks that, along with Margaret Holmes’ seasoned green beans and a salad, was our evening meal. The steaks were well seasoned with Montreal Steak seasoning with a bit of chopped garlic and prepared quickly in my big red hot cast iron skillet.

Cooked until 'just right' in unsalted butter and a little olive oil, the flavor was beyond description. But the good times around camp that evening, eating and catching up on what's been going on in each others lives, was only the beginning of this adventure.

The next morning, we would be out early after the gobblers and that evening, switch to a nocturnal hog hunt. My buddies have said that I could turn a New England grouse shoot into a hog hunt and that's not far from the truth! Randy had a feeder on the back of the ranch that hogs had been frequenting on a nightly basic, coming in around 10. Perfect timing! This would give us time to re coop a bit after our day of turkey hunting and get in the big 4 ft. by 8 ft. stand by 9:00 p.m.

I had the batteries fully charged on my Nite Site 200 and Nite Site Spotter. Mounted on my Ruger Number 1 in .270, this rig was a tack driver and I knew any hog within 200 yards and even a bit farther out would be well within range. Just before dark that evening, we heard a chain reaction as roosting gobblers all along the river sound off. The anticipation of the next morning turkey hunt made it a bit difficult to sleep that first night.

Some folks are trophy turkey hunters, they are looking for gobblers with beards that almost drag the ground and long spurs. Mark and I are not. We target the first legal gobbler that comes to the call. Other than the thrill of tricking one of these wary birds within shooting range, we are thinking about the great tasting turkey fajitas or chicken fried turkey strips our birds will make. We both killed gobblers that first morning and had plenty of time to rest, prepare supper and then on to the night hunt for hogs.

I have owned my Nite Site 200 and Nite Site Spotter a month or so. I’d mounted it on the .270 and tested it at night near my home. Around my house, I learned that in pitch dark, I can make out the ears of a house cat at 150 yards and see to shoot much farther. The Spotter, which is a great complement to the scope mounted Nite Site, is a great aid is looking for game but, used alone, the Nite Site gets the job done. It’s just easier to scan the area with the spotter and once a hog is located, get the rifle up and put the Nite Site on him.

If you’ve never seen the Nite Site in action, check out the videos on the web site www.nitesiteusa.com. These units are absolutely awesome and are already revolutionizing the way many folks hunt hogs at night. The price is about a fourth what one would expect to pay for most 3rd generation night vision units.

Mark was to be the shooter on this hunt and Randy and I took turns scanning the pitch blackness for approaching hogs with the Nite Site Spotter. After setting into the big elevated blind, situated 80 yards from the feeder, we soon heard hogs squealing down on the Brazos River, about a quarter mile to our east.

“I'm betting they are heading to us,” whispered Randy. They should be here in ten or fifteen
Randy was scanning the opening in the brush behind the feeder and soon notified us that he saw hogs.

“There are four heading to the corn,” Randy said. “One big hog and three 125 pound eaters.”

Mark already had the rifle in the window of the blind and was studying the screen of the Nite Site for hogs.

We had decided that a good ‘eater’ hog was on our hit list and Mark wasted no time in centering the image of the scope’s crosshairs on a little boar. I was watching through the Spotter as he shot and at first, wondered if he had missed.

“I had the scope right on his shoulder. I couldn’t have missed him,” says Mark.

I watched the hog running for cover and was hoping I had not knocked the scope out of whack. Mark is an expert shot and I felt comfortable he has the crosshairs where they needed to be when he gently tugged the trigger and sent the 130 grain bullet on its way.

I stayed in the blind with the Spotter and directed Mark and Randy to the exact spot the boar was standing when Mark shot. Sure enough, as it often the case with hogs, a minute bit of blood was on the ground where the hog was standing, then a heavy blood trail 20 yards back in the brush. The shot was perfect and our ‘eater’ hog was soon loaded in the truck and in 15 minutes we were back on at camp.

If you are looking for a great ranch to go after turkey, deer or hogs, check visit the ranches web site www.daleriverranch.com. Or call Randy Douglas at 214-797-2217. I’m planning to join Randy in early October for a 3 day bow hunt for trophy whitetail buck, doe, turkey and hog. We will be headquartering in the comfortable lodge overlooking the Brazos and meals will be provided. Randy says the hunt will be limited to 4 bow hunters.

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