SOMETIMES, JUST BEING THERE IS ENOUGH!
Luke Clayton

Most outdoor articles are centered around an adventure or escapade in which game is harvested or fish landed. I’ve written thousands of such articles in my quarter century as an outdoors writer but you know, sometimes, actually quite regularly, the rewards of fishing and hunting trips aren’t measured in tangibles such as fish or game for the freezer or antlers for the wall.

I’ve been on far more hunting trips when I did not harvest game than when I came home with a cooler full of venison or birds, likewise with fishing trips. These days, we no longer fish and hunt solely for food. The real rewards are measured in quality time we have the occasion to share with friends and family. There was a time when an unsuccessful hunt or fishing trip equated to meager meals for the family but for most of us, those days are long past. We can buy meat at the meat market or fish in the seafood department at the corner grocery. The uninterrupted time we share in the outdoors is the real rewards we glean from time spent fishing and hunting.

This past week was a good example of great times in the outdoors for me but little or no fish or game! I am fortunate to live within a mile of some remote backwater ponds surrounded by hardwoods that attract large numbers of wild hogs and when the acorns are on the ground, deer.

I’ve been pretty much the homebody this past week spending my time writing and working on my radio program and getting my fall garden in shape but each day I devoted some time to my little lease. One of my buddies, Joe Dunn, has a BBQ Ministry and feeds the homeless. We came up with the idea about this time last year of supplying chopped BBQ from game to the folks that need it most. Last year, I came close to biting off more than I could handle when I drove to a ranch and skinned and quartered a total of 6 whitetail does then, fired up Joe’s smoker and slow smoked them about 16 hours. The meat was chopped, BBQ sauce added and the tasty BBQ was promptly delivered to The Dallas International Street Church where it served as the main course for a couple of meals. Each day, the homeless come to the church and are served a hot meal and attend a church service. My goal this past week was to harvest some fresh pork from the woods and convert it into some tasty BBQ for the folks, which brings us back to the crux of today’s article!

I’ve been monitoring a couple of feeders on the property near my home and hogs have been hitting the corn nightly, somewhere between 9 and 11 pm. Joe and I decided it was time to put some fresh pork in the freezer for our upcoming BBQ.
Luke’s night hog hunting set up. With a Predator Trail Camera nearby to keep record of the hogs, a quality feeder by Ultralight Feeders to attract them and a Feedlite to illuminate the porkers, success is usually high but, not always!

We arrived at one of the ‘hot’ stands about 8 and settled in to harvest one or two hogs. We were armed with our Bows set up for night hunting with sight pin lights and Hawglites. The Hawglite emits a bright (80 lumens) beam in red, green or white when a toggle switch is pressed on the bow, it’s an awesome tool for hunting hogs after dark. I have a Feed Light hanging from a tree nearby the feeder. These units are battery powered and come with a built in solar panel to insure the battery stays charged. When the sun goes down, the Feedlite comes on automatically.

With the Hawglite for shooting hogs in the dark and the aid of the Feedlite to illuminate the area right under the corn feeder, Joe and I figured we had the odds stacked in our favor. The hogs had other ideas! About 11:15 my buddy and I decided it was time to ‘call in the dogs’! We’d watched several very fat raccoons eating under the feeder but the porkers we were seeking never showed. The next morning I went back to put some corn in the feeder and checked my Predator Trail Camera. It was set in video mode. I watched a couple of short videos of hogs chowing down on my corn. The first group arrived precisely at midnight. If only Joe and I had stayed put 45 minutes longer! We’ll get our pork for the homeless this week, I’m positive. Although our night hunt was unsuccessful in regards to meat in the cooler, we both thoroughly enjoyed being in the quiet fall woods, listening to passing packs of coyotes (probably the reason the hogs didn’t show), and in whispered voices, catching up on what’s been taking place with our families. Don’t worry, the folks that enjoy our BBQ won’t have to wait long to wait. We’re planning round TWO with the porkers in a couple days. Our luck will change! The Predator Trail camera setting over the feeder has been recording large numbers of porkers arriving to eat early in the evening!
As previously mentioned, I’ve also been devoting some time to fishing in the ponds here close to home. The land I hunt has several gravel and sand pits that usually provide excellent bass fishing. I use my Nucanoe, which is a very versatile little craft ideal for fishing and hunting, to access the more remote areas of the ponds where the big bass lurk. With cooling water temperatures and armed with Lonnie Stanley’s Ribbit Frogs rigged on the tandem hooks, I felt confident I’d enjoy some excellent big bass action.

On a couple of early morning outings, I dragged the frog over every lily pad and around every stick up on the lake without one strike! On previous trips, I’d used the bait to catch multiple bass. When a bass hits a frog on the surface, the strike is explosive, the goal is to kill the hapless frog. During a time of the year when bass are supposed to hit anything thrown at them, I never got a strike! I tried other surface baits, shallow running cranks and finally, my old standby the Texas rigged worm without so much as a nibble. Again, I had a wonderful time fishing the placid waters during my favorite time of the year. My fishing trips were a great success even though the fish did not cooperate!

As I head into this coming week, my spirits and expectations are soaring. I’m heading up to Squaw Mountain Ranch to bow hunt the big whitetails the ranch is becoming famous for. Last year I was present when a 226 BC buck was harvested. So far this season, the ranch has produced a couple of monster bucks, one scored in the mid 180’s and the other a whopping 202 BC. More on this upcoming hunt next week!

Listen to Outdoors With Luke Clayton for a new show each week at www.catfishradio.com