

PORK CHOPPER HOG HUNTING

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The journal of the

Texas Trophy Hunters

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The author decided to use an outfitter this time around, and found what he was looking for. He took this big eight-point buck with a 19-inch inside spread.

PANHANDLE BONANZA

By Scott Murray

Other than a few decent bucks and does, my hunting success has been pretty limited. In other words, no trophy bucks. I've always had the "do-it-yourself" approach and limited myself to a tight budget because that's the way my dad raised me. I always enjoy the hunting experience and the anticipation it brings has been a very big part. But I'm looking forward to the hunt being the best part. With the past few years being unsuccessful, it was time to make a change.

As I approached my 50th birthday I decided to spend a little money and go with an outfitter, one that knows the local deer patterns and has spent the time required managing the land to produce quality animals. I was only looking for a free-range type hunt. I also wanted one that wasn't going to break the bank. Through some friends I found out about All American Outfitter in the Texas Panhandle.

When the time finally came I was so excited I could not contain myself. When I arrived I was pleasantly surprised, but somewhat concerned about the lack of trees and cover. You could see for 10 miles over the grass prairies and shallow canyons in and around Clarendon, Texas.

It was the first weekend of bow season and I was with the first group to hunt.

The October weather was excellent with cool nights and mild days with a steady 10 to 15 mph wind that's a constant in the Panhandle. I was put in a tree stand set up in big old cedar tree that had minimal shooting lanes, but was hidden well and set up nicely over a feeder. After watching several does come and go, one mature doe became my first bow kill.

The next morning revealed not so great weather. It was drizzling and forecast to rain through the day. But that was not going to stop us. I had a dollar store poncho in my bag and I was willing to use it.

I sat there believing the morning hunt was a bust when I saw a doe to my right. As I watched her I noticed some other movement under my stand. Through the thick underbrush I saw the biggest antlers I had ever seen in my life. Coming in from behind me, this giant whitetail stood right under my tree. He was on my right side, but with too many limbs and thick brush to even think about taking a shot.

This buck was a huge, basic eight-point with a crab claw on the tip of his right antler to make him a nine-point. He had mass all the way through with a unique carved look and a light bone color. He was magnificent!

As my hands trembled I got in position to draw and prayed for him to take just two more steps—and he did. In preparation for this hunt I must have made a thousand shots, but

never did I have so much trouble as I did drawing back on this buck. It felt like I was drawing 100 pounds. I struggled getting it to let off, and when it did, I let out a light groan that sent the big buck off another 10 yards, but still in range at 25 yards. He settled down and gave me a quartering away shot heading into the thicket where I found my doe the previous day.

I put my second pin right behind his shoulder and took a deep breath and let it fly. But he turned to the left and took the arrow directly into his right backstrap. This big old boy did not even flinch. I could see the arrow sticking out of his back, angling forward towards his chest with maybe 12 inches of arrow inside of him.

I was in shock! I don't even think he knew he was hit. I nocked another arrow in hopes he would present another shot. I could see a small trickle of blood running down his back as he walked away. He did stop again at 40 yards, but did not give me a shot before he trotted away with no worries.

I was sick. I could not believe what I had just seen. I went from super excitement to ultimate disappointment

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in a matter of one minute.

Ken decided to call his friend Jeff who owns a tracking dog to help search for my buck. Jeff, his son, and his dog "Annie" arrived that afternoon a few hours before dark. Jeff let us know the ground rules to ensure we had the best opportunity to find my deer. I was willing to do just about anything.

Once we made it to the first sign of blood, Jeff released Annie and she made a beeline directly down the ravine, through the creek, and right to the last spot of blood we found. Then she went into the oak scrub. We knew Annie was on the right track, but ...

We spent the next couple of hours right up until dark tracking that deer. My heart sank. We decided the deer would live to see another day. Hopefully some other hunter

will have the opportunity to kill the deer of a lifetime.

On the third day of our hunt I moved to a different stand, but in the same area as before. This particular piece of property was an old apple orchard. It still had some fruit bearing trees that hold a lot of animals.

That afternoon the action was steady. There were a lot of young deer. They took advantage of the corn I had put on the ground before I got in the stand. While watching the deer feed, a group of 40 to 50 turkey hens came from around the corner and invaded the feeder. The deer and turkey began to fight over the remaining corn on the ground. It was quite comical to watch the young deer kick at the turkey.

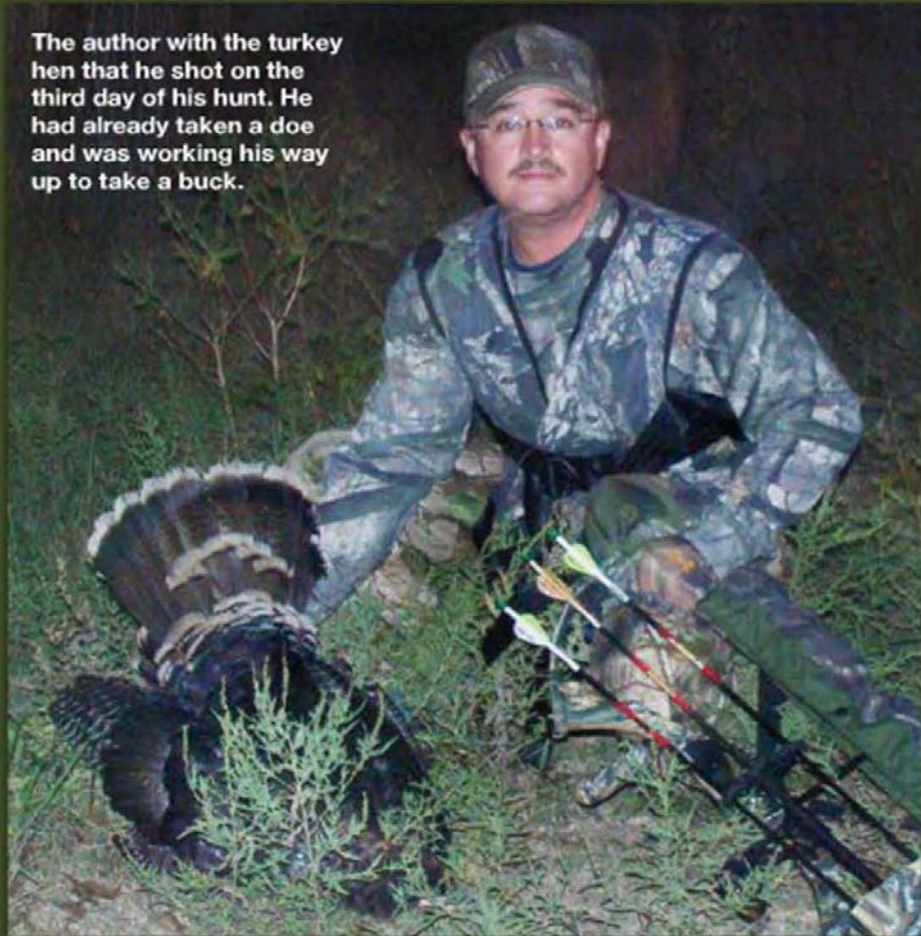
As I quickly glanced over, I did not see a beard in the bunch and felt I was in the clear to take aim and get a hen. I drew back and tried to target one, but they never stood still. This would not be easy.

I picked out what looked to be one of the larger hens and held on her until she turned around to give me walking away shot. I led her just a hair at about 15 yards and released the arrow. I got her through the inner wing and down through the leg.

The rest of the hens all headed for the hills. The does just moved back into the trees and watched as I put a field tip through the hen to finish the job. After that, the does came right back to the feeder to finish up the remaining corn.

As I sat there watching the sun go down I began to realize

The author with the turkey hen that he shot on the third day of his hunt. He had already taken a doe and was working his way up to take a buck.



what I was experiencing. I had shot everyday. I had one doe, one turkey, and of course the emotional roller coaster ride the day before with that buck. I was having the time of my life.

On our way afield the last morning Ken let me know that I would be his "runner." After setting up two other hunters along a well-traveled route from the feeding fields to the

river, Ken placed me along a berm bordering an agricultural field. My instructions were to keep my phone on vibrate in my front pocket, stay low, and be ready to move quickly.

Ken called and sent me to the windmill where he was glassing. He then sent me down into a ravine and had me come up along a fence line where he believed some deer might be moving. Another hunter was set up by a lone tree on the way to the ravine and towards the river, a path the deer take every morning.

As I came up out of the ravine and peered over the top, I could see a few does 15 yards away. They immediately knew something was up, so I lay there behind some scrub brush along the fence trying not to move or be seen. As I looked down

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the fence line I could see one of the hunters in our group 100 yards away with a string of huge bucks staring at him. They were out of range, but knew something was wrong.

The herd wanted to get past him to make their way into the ravine and towards the river, but was being very cautious. The hunter discovered what I had already learned, no cover to range or draw without being seen. The deer knew something was not right.

I decided to bail out and head back into the ravine and not risk spooking the deer. I headed deep into the ravine along the fence line where I knew the deer would eventually travel. I set up on the backside of a grass-covered mound in the ravine bottom. I peeked over the top, watching the trail along the fence.

My hope was to see them coming and then catch them as they passed by me before heading up the other side of the ravine on their way to the river. As I sat there anticipating the herd's arrival, I heard a noise behind me. It was a group of about 15 does all running through the ravine and headed up the other side. They had dropped down into the ravine at another location due to the pressure they were getting.

After watching them head up the ravine I could see bucks already out of the ravine running through the grass on their way to the river safe and sound. Right then my phone buzzed; it was Ken telling me to head out of the ravine towards the lone tree where he would pick us up. I had already put my arrow back in the quiver while walking into the tall grass when I came face to face with two does. When they turned around to head back the other way I dropped onto my back in the tall grass.

I knew they wanted to head my way to catch up with the rest of the herd. So I looked over the grass and saw them standing there and eventually start back towards me. I went back into the grass and nocked an arrow. Lying flat on my back I came to full draw and waited to see ears over the top of the grass.

When I saw the tips of her ears I sat up and quickly got off a shot. I

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got up and nocked another arrow. As I reached to top of the slope I saw one of the hunters pointing into the tall grass along the fence line indicating my deer was down. As I slowly approached I could see her lying there and put another arrow in her to finish the job.

For our last evening's hunt, we headed to a different area. It's a bottoms area with a tree lined creek and some decent cover. I asked Ken to set me up in an elevated stand. The first

The shot was so far off, the buck did not even seem concerned. I nocked another arrow, this time ensuring I was clear from obstructions. I refocused my peep and sight back on the buck and let another arrow fly.

Bull's-eye!

setup he took me to was the ladder stand. It has a feeder and some decent trees surrounded by fields. As I headed to the ladder stand I asked Ken if I still had the green light to shoot a buck. He said yes, but only a good buck. That was good enough for me.

I got in the stand about 3:45 p.m. It was still daylight savings time in early October, so it didn't get dark until 7:40. Other than one startled doe that ran by me at six o'clock, I did not see anything. As the long afternoon wound down, the memories of my experience in the Texas Panhandle went through my mind. I knew it was only a few minutes before shooting light was

gone, and the hunt would be over, so I thought it might be time to lower my bow and climb down.

But then I re-thought the situation and decided to be patient and wait until it was too dark to shoot. You never know what might happen. And then it did happen. Like a script from a movie, right at last light, a big mature buck along with a doe came in from my right and stopped within 15 yards.

It was getting dark fast and I did not have any time to waste. I drew back and put the first pin right behind his shoulder and released the arrow. To my amazement, the arrow took a hard left turn missing the buck by 8 feet and hitting the dirt next to a tree. I had hit a small low hanging tree limb and deflected the arrow!

The shot was so far off, the buck did not even seem concerned. I nocked another arrow, this time ensuring I was clear from obstructions. I refocused my peep and sight back on the buck and let another arrow fly. Bull's-eye!

This one hit perfectly behind the shoulder and penetrated his lungs, sending him into a nose-plow as he ran out of the area. I could hear him crash in the grass not too far away. I raised my hands and thanked God for the opportunity to take such a wonderful animal. My whole body began to shake and tremble.

I had never experienced anything like it. I could barely dial my cell phone to call Ken and give him the news. I shook so badly I had to get down from that stand before I fell out. Once on the ground, I began pacing in circles waiting on Ken to arrive.

In a matter of minutes he drove up with his truck and we began our search with flashlights. We didn't have to go very far. I came up on the buck first and saw what a beast he was. Ken estimated he weighed between 250 and 300 pounds, and about 5½ years old.

He was a basic eight-point with one main beam broken off just past his G3, and had split G2s on both sides. Very much like a mule deer. He was high and wide with a 19-inch inside spread and a little more than 10-inch G2s. This was for sure the best deer I had ever shot, and I got him with my bow! 🏹