

Gobble, Gobble, Gone!

By James Corley Sanders

I love to hunt. In the autumn, when the air turns cool and the leaves change from green to brilliant shades of yellow, orange, and red, you know that special time...hunting season has arrived. Squirrel season, deer season, and duck season fill the fall and early winter with hours of activities and fun.

After the holidays and hunting season is gone the days grow short and gloomy. The colorful leaves are gone and the forest looks stark and asleep. We clean our guns and put them away for another year. Maybe that is why turkey season is so special. As the forest begins to awaken with tiny buds and return to life...Bam- it is turkey season!!!

Grandpa and I got into the mule (ATV) about three o'clock and drove down a very bumpy road to the creek. We got out and walked across an old foot log to get to the other side of the creek where a long ridge rises above the flat where the mule is parked. The ridge has an assortment of hardwood trees with a few Cyprus and pines sprinkled in. It has a dense assortment of shrubs and grasses.

Today is scouting day. We are looking for signs, tracks, dusting areas, stray feathers, or just anything that will alert us to a flock of turkeys. We walk to the edge of the ridge and find several tracks in the sandy soil so we know we are in the right location. We sit down on an old log which is half hidden by the tall bushes. Now comes the hard part...the waiting. Just waiting, listening and looking while trying to be still. We wait and wait. Just before dark we hear a scratching sound in the dry leaves on the ground. The sun had almost disappeared when we heard the rush of wings as the turkeys begin to fly into the old tree to our right,

Grandpa said it was too late today, but we had found a good place to hunt and we would return tomorrow. We walked back to the mule quietly and loaded up. On the way back home we began to make plans for the big hunt tomorrow.

Next morning Nana fixed pancakes and sausage for breakfast. I ate as quickly as I could while Grandpa drank his coffee. Great thing about camping at Nana's house is that she will feed you real good. She also provides snacks to put in our pockets for later in case hunting is slow. Not a bad way to start the morning.

Grandpa and I check out hunting gear one more time. Then we load up in the mule and head for our selected hunting spot. Just as the sunlight begins to break in the sky we drive off. We arrive at our destination and unload our gear. Grandpa says the turkeys will have left their roost and be looking for some breakfast themselves. So we start to walk toward the tree line.

Then we heard it. A faint gobble sound. Then another gobble sound. Grandpa made about three scratches on his old cedar box turkey call. That thing must be fifty years old but it still puts out a very realistic sound. He has a rubber band around the call to keep the parts in place but it still works. Grandpa never replaces any equipment that still works. He says being new does not make it better.

Another scratch and the turkey responds. Grandpa said be quiet and look for the turkey. It is coming our way. Now I could hear the rustling of leaves, but I could not see the turkey for the tall grass. Another scratch and the turkey walks closer. As he came he would walk a few steps then disappear in tall grass only to reappear closer each time.

Grandpa said get ready. The turkey is definitely coming this way. The young tom walked around the edge of a log no more than 30 steps and stopped. He was looking around. I raised my Remington 20 gauge and took good aim. Just as I was about to pull the trigger, an old sow with three baby pigs darted out of the woods and scared the turkey. It flew off and we never saw it again.

I did not kill my first turkey that day. I did not earn bragging rights or bring home meat for the table, but I did experience the great thrill of hunting turkeys. I knew the turkeys would be there probably all season and Grandpa and I would have another chance to kill that young tom. It was ok because now Grandpa and I would have another reason to go hunting again.