

# Hog Super Heroes

By Paul Ladner

**W**hen pigs fly... well I haven't tried shooting them out of the sky yet but I have hunted them in some pretty disparate environments. Hogs are tough, adaptive omnivores that wreak havoc on the native flora and fauna. Living in Illinois, there are no opportunities for hunting them here as any occurrence has been aggressively suppressed. From what I have seen we are lucky to have held them at bay. With that said, I am a bit jealous of those that have them in their backyard.

My hog hunting has involved travel to southern states that are burdened with large populations of them. PBS connections have been invaluable to put me on some decent spots. I have made near annual hog hunting trips for about eight years visiting Florida, Georgia, Alabama and Texas. These trips have been after the deer season ends and before spring turkey is underway. Who doesn't like to go south for the winter? They are a worthy adversary with noses of blood bounds and are delicious table fair.

Jeff Holchin is my super hero of Georgia hog hunting having led PBS hunts for many years on the coastal salt marsh. He has researched, scouted, valet serviced from the airport (an hour+ away), boat taxied, rescued, fed, sheltered, provisioned and entertained dozens of PBS members. He often has a dozen or more in camp at a time and twenty through camp in a week! I hear he has actually

managed to hunt a day or two by himself and has brought some nice ones to bag.

I've joined Jeff in Georgia at least four times. The first was my maiden hog hunting voyage and Jeff was super accommodating. Some people would hunt this muddy, gator and snake infested, dead flat, often underwater tidal flat covered with seven foot tall vegetation once and call it good, but not me. I have even invited my son on the subsequent hunts to show him a good time. Now that's love! Not sure it will earn me the father of the year, but he seems to like it, too.

The hog population seems to rise and fall due largely to the actions of the Fish and Wildlife helicopter shooters so some islands will be decimated while decent populations exist on others, but also hurricanes, gators and hunters with dogs have an impact. So it is with hunting, you need to find where they are. Scouting is mostly by watercraft cruising slowly around the islands hoping to hear the grunting and chomping of a content sow, the squeals of some feisty piglets or the ruckus of fighting boars. Light wind and cool temperatures are perfect as you can more easily hear the hogs and the warm weather loving reptiles and bugs are not as active. Some wind is needed for the stalk.

Once hogs are located the boat needs to



be secured keeping in mind the six plus feet tidal fluctuation every six hours. Being from the Midwest the impact of the tides adds a whole new dimension to the challenges of this hunt and if you don't mind them you may find yourself stranded for hours. With a tide that large there is almost always a strong current going either in or out. That and sand bars that shift over time make navigating a thinking man's game. It really works best when someone drops you off in one spot and picks you up at another following the hunt hence the boat taxi service Jeff provides.

With the boat secured it's time to get the stalk on. Keep the wind in your face and act like a hog rather than sneak around which is impossible to do anyway. The hogs grunt softly when content and chomp on the roots of the vegetation. You can use a grunt call or just make grunting sounds with your mouth and the chomping sounds can be made by rocking your hip wader clad foot back and forth in the mud. I like to get close to game before taking a shot and here there are only close shots. Often you can't see a hog even when it is five yards from you.

Tag teaming is the best option and makes a nice change from my usual tree stand hunting.



It's why it has been so fun for my son and me. Hand signals help to communicate between hunters. Once in the hogs you have to be patient and hope one crosses in front of you upwind giving you the opportunity for a shot. Often you can be within several yards of hogs for quite a while before a shot presents itself.

An alternative to the cruise and listen approach is to hit the "beach" and just forge ahead. It is pretty easy to gauge the freshness of sign and it is obvious when you get into an area that the hogs have been recently rooting as the ground will be turned up and the sign otherwise fresh. Blindly tromping around can be exhausting as you stumble upon impassable tidal creeks and there is rarely a place to sit without getting a wet rear end. There is no dry ground other than damp hogs nests and the flotsam washed in from the last hurricane. Navigating is also a challenge as everything looks the same and there is no elevation to get above the vegetation to see around. Having some sort of GPS unit is advised and marking waypoints is important to find your way back to the boat.

As for hunter success, it has been reason-

able overall and good for me. Other than my first trip, I have gone home with some fresh pork. My son has been successful on two hunts as well. When you get into them, doubling is certainly a possibility.

On a previous year's trip we moved in on a couple of feeding sows and I was afforded a shot before Richard. I hit one of the sows and they both took off. After a bit of blood trailing we found my hog and the other was still hanging around. She bolted from my presence and ran past Rich. He drew back, swung and released an arrow. I wish I had a better view of the action. Rich thought he missed the shot and advanced very slowly to where the hog was last heard. It had carried on for a minute and then was quiet. He moved forward carefully assuming the hog had silently snuck off. Not until he was within ten yards could he see the hog. He drew back and took another shot. It turns out the hog was already dead having been hit in the heart by the first running shot! We were elated.

I could bore you with stories of similar opportunities, but you get the picture. Would I do it again? Of course.

My Texas hog super hero is Bubba Graves. He has been hosting a mountain hog hunt for years as well. He was just as gracious as Jeff making sure all in camp had a great time. He made a four hour round trip to pick me up from the airport after weather related travel issues prevented me from following through on the original travel plans. Unbelievable is all I can say.

This was the first time I went on his hunt and other than the hogs, the hunt could not be more different. The area is not just mountainous it is also desert! Climbing and tripping over erosion rounded rocks of all sizes makes for a real workout. There is pretty thick brushy vegetation and a fair amount of thorns. Navigation is pretty simple as the mountains are divided by creek bottom ravines. If you stay in one drainage (and it would be pretty hard to cross out of the one you are in) you can follow the bottoms back down to camp.

Even though it is a desert, drinking water is more available than in the tidal flats. There are several springs providing good fresh water. The oak trees

→ *continued on page 36*



~ continued from page 35

here in Illinois and the acorns are tiny, but the hogs were feeding on them pretty good just the same.

Locating the hogs required some hoofing it and again listening as hogs are social and vocal animals. They root through the rocks around the oak trees often on hill sides sometimes resulting in mini rock slides making them easy to focus in on. I didn't figure out how to stalk in on them as they seemed harder to fool in the rocky thicket than the muddy marsh, but it might have been a matter of figuring out the needed tactics. I decided late in the hunt that an ambush approach may be my best bet. We identified an area the hogs were working regularly and a natural ground blind play did allow me an opportunity which I did not capitalize on.

There are javelinas as well as hogs in the area and we had some opportunities on those as well. We saw Indian artwork and found evidence of their handicrafts by way of stone tools. Indians and later cowboys haunted these mountain ravines. We saw elk as well as exotic, but well adapted aoudads. The aoudads really knocked rocks off the ledges as they butted heads!

Life in camp on all occasions has been just as rewarding as the hunt. There are many things to be learned from fellow hunters if you will just sit back and listen. Shared meals around a camp fire are primordial. Being regaled with stories of transcontinental hunting adventures

like bonsai versions of the oaks

of others serves to stoke the fire within any bowhunter's heart. These hunts are also pretty cheap, depending on travel expenses mostly. License requirements are minimal and sometimes not required at all. I have spent as little as a couple hundred dollars and no more than about \$600 if air travel was involved.

What an honor to be able to experience such unique and diverse habitats. Thank you to my PBS brothers for putting yourselves out to make it possible. When it is the dead of winter, go south young man (or old man), chase some bacon and take a ride on Superman's cape.



## Great Northern Bowhunting

CRAFTING QUALITY BOWS  
& QUIVERS SINCE 1982

[www.GreatNorthernBowhunting.com](http://www.GreatNorthernBowhunting.com)

8635 Thornapple Lake Rd., Nashville, Michigan 49073  
Phone: 1(269)838-5437