

Bagging Memories

By Jama L. Jarrett

I have always admired those strong, confident outdoors women who are as equally at home with bagging a turkey in the field as with picking one up from the local grocer. Admittedly, I'm not one, yet. But inspired by my husband's desire to introduce our son to the sport of turkey hunting, and his constant push to get me out of the shopping mall, I found myself donning camouflage and taking to the woods to learn what it takes to be a skilled hunter.

Hunting in West Virginia is usually a family tradition that goes back generations. Folks hunt to put food on the table, which in the process also controls wildlife populations and stimulates the economy. More importantly, however, people hunt so they can spend time with their families. The strong bonds that are formed while spending the day on a hunt can last a lifetime.

West Virginia is blessed with an abundance of wildlife that keeps families in the woods almost year round. Young hunters can take advantage of four youth hunting days that allow younger members of the family to safely spend a day in the woods without the mass of other hunters. Special one-day seasons are held in the spring for turkey hunting and in the fall for squirrel, antlerless deer and waterfowl hunting.

Youth hunting day in April marks the beginning of spring gobbler season in West Virginia. In 2008, approximately 3,000 kids between the ages of eight and 14 ventured out into the state's mountains and forests to try their luck at finding a wild turkey. Imagine it! No television, no video games – just the harmonious sounds of nature and the conversation among family members. And thanks to the uninvited bugs that continued flying in my face and up my nose, it gave my husband and son an excuse to form an alliance against me and strengthen their own bond. Apparently there is great joy to be found in my misery.



Photo by Ron Snow

My son pointing out an ant hill.

My husband has hunted since he was a young boy. His uncle and grandfather would take him to the family farm in Greenbrier County and teach him about the principles of hunting, gun safety, and the value of conservation and spending time with family. Now it is his turn to pass along all that he has learned and this tradition to his own children, and to the wife who may one day actually sit still long enough to enjoy the pastime.

My eight-year-old son became interested in hunting a couple years ago when he received his first shotgun. Like me, he gets bored after a period of time. Apparently a short attention span runs in the family. Unlike me, he embraces the bugs and finds entertainment in their desire to aggravate me. Nevertheless, he does make an effort to enjoy the hunt and listens intently as my husband explains how to use a turkey call, something I doubted would bring in an animal. But what do I know?



Mark Stock

The one that got away . . .

Once we double checked our gear and made sure everyone was properly and safely dressed, we set out on our journey for that prized turkey. After a very long hike, my husband sat us down in an area that he said looked "promising." To me, the spot looked the same as every other location we trekked past on our two-mile-long walk from the car. Ignoring my whining, my husband assured me that if we were quiet and remained still he was confident we would call in a gobbler. Considering we had walked all over the bug-infested terrain and didn't once see or hear a turkey, I had my doubts. But who was I to argue with the "king of the woods?"

My husband's first calls sounded to me like an asthmatic struggling for air. But after several, subsequent calls he did start to sound like a turkey. After many attempts, and much to my amazement, he was finally able to get a response from an interested gobbler. My son, who at this point was preoccupied with an ant hill, perked up and told me to sit still and listen. This matter-of-fact demand caught me off guard and I remained motionless, not able to find the words to tell him I was the one who gave orders, not him.

Obedying my son's order to sit still and listen.

Eager to bring the bird closer, my husband called again; eager to find his soul mate, the bird answered. As this manner of communication went on for what seemed like hours, the gobbler did appear to get closer with each call. With my husband's guidance, my son prepared his gun for his first shot at a turkey. And then it happened – dead silence. No more gobbles. My husband continued to call, but there was no response. There we sat, amazed and confused by the events that led us to this disappointing moment. That old turkey had outsmarted us.

We left the woods that day without a turkey. But we also left with something much more important, a great time and life-long memories. My son was excited about almost bagging a turkey. He was even more excited however about sharing our adventure with family and friends and blaming me for the lost opportunity. That's okay though; all that matters is that he had a good time with his family. I'll take the blame for that any day.

I look forward to spending time in the woods again with these two entertaining hunters. Hopefully, by the time the next opportunity arrives, I will have learned the value of patience and the humor in being attacked by bugs. Until then, I will reluctantly fight the crowds while "hunting" for my turkey at the local grocery store.

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Ron Snow