

## Pa-Pa's Gobbler

Written by Freddy McGuire

Thursday, 24 March 2011 08:05 - Last Updated Thursday, 24 March 2011 08:06

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As the black turned to slate grey and the trees started taking shape I couldn't help but reflect on past hunts on Pa-Pa's mountain. The first ever spring hunting trip up here resulted in a nice gobbler and many more after that. Since we bought the place a couple years ago it seemed that all the gobblers had left with Pa-Pa. This year, however, was different. I had done a fair amount of scouting and had located a few gobblers on the place. The one roosted somewhere in the darkness below me was the one I was after. I had heard this gobbler and even watched him one morning as he danced for the multitude of hens around him.

The evening before, as I was out trying to roost a gobbler, he walked by me at 40 yards and then heavy wingbeats indicated where he would spend the night. The plan was laid and I would return in the morning. I asked Amy if she would join me for the hunt and she politely declined, almost knowing that there was something special about this hunt, and knowing that I should go at it alone.

The alarm woke me at 5:00 and I felt a sense of urgency pushing me out of the bed and I had more energy than normal for this time in the season. I dressed quietly, not wanting to wake Abby or Amy and slipped out the door fully expecting the rain they had been calling for. It was bone-dry and I looked at the stars and realized I was catching a break.

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The drive over was filled with different scenarios playing out in my head of how the morning would unfold. Would he gobble? Would he have too many hens to cooperate? Could something have bumped him off the roost in the night? Would I be able to calm my nerves to make the shot if one presented itself? Stuff I never really worry about, but this morning was different, completely different.

I parked the truck in the familiar spot, gathered my gear, and proceeded up the mountain in the dark. There is no need for a flashlight as I could walk the trail blindfolded. I eased up the edge of the field and before entering the woods finalized my gear and made sure everything was in order. I wasn't sure what tree I wanted to be at, but I knew the general area. With the woods being so dry my approach above the roosted gobbler was not as quiet as I would have liked, but I slipped into position well before daylight.

As I was thinking back on past hunts a turkey gobbled over on the next ridge. Did I make a mistake by not going to him this morning? He was really gobbling, right in the very spot I killed my first gobbler on this place. Maybe he is the turkey I should be setup on? As the darkness faded away other turkeys joined in the chorus but "my" gobbler was silent. As it got lighter and lighter I could make out a few hen turkeys in the trees below me. It looked like I was going to have my work cut out for me.

As I was questioning my choice of turkeys to go after "my" bird gobbles 100 yard out the ridge to my left. "Yes!" Over the next half hour he only gobbles a time or two more, while the other turkeys are trying to out-do each other. Then, as if on cue, the big gobbler flew down onto the face of the hillside where I am waiting. One hen glides across the creek and to the other

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property. Two other hens fly down on the finger ridge to my right. I could hear the gobbler below me walking in the leaves. I could never see him as he headed toward the hens that I was certain were feeding just out of sight.

The leaf crunching fades away and I think the game is over when I glance to my right and see his tail fan, and him pirouetting for the hens I knew were right below him. Some soft calling got him to turn my way, but would he actually leave the hens to come over and see the new girl on the block? Like so many times before, I had my doubts. He continued to strut back and forth, just over the crest of the hill so I could only see his back, head, and fan most of the time. This went on for what seemed like an eternity, when in fact, it was only about 15 minutes. Knowing the hens would not stand there under the hill all day I decided to get a little more aggressive with my calling and hope he would break away from his harem. He must have liked what he heard as he started showing a bit more interest in the unseen hen.

He finally broke and started coming, just to my left on the side of the ridge. I had a couple shots but wanted to capture as much video as I could. He went behind a clump of trees and I adjusted the camera, got the gun up, and waited for the shot. He came around the tree, raised his brightly colored head and I squeezed the trigger.

As I stood over the fallen gobbler thoughts were rushing through my mind about what had just happened. I have killed many turkeys in the past, probably a lifetimes worth, but this turkey and this place and this moment was unmatched. When I knelt down beside the beautiful gobbler, smoothing out his feathers and grasping the sharp spurs and long beard, I knew I wasn't alone. The Good Lord looking over one shoulder and Pa-Pa looking over the other. It was then that I realized, as the rain started falling, this turkey didn't stand a chance.

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In Memory of Pa-Pa Fred