



A young boar tempts fate and wins.

Wild Boars and Crossbows

In the Old South

by
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Photos by Richard Kevorkian and John Shtogren

On Labor Day my brand new crossbow stood quietly in the corner of my den, all sighted in with no place to go. It was still four long weeks to the opening of the archery big

game season in Virginia when crossbows finally would be legal. I'm not good at waiting; never have been. I made a long distance call, put my crossbow and two empty coolers in the truck and headed

south, south of the borders, to another country called South Carolina.

South Carolina is different from Virginia—there are plenty of wild boar. Once thriving plantations along rivers like



Boars come in all colors.



NAP Shockwave broadheads are designed to flare open on impact.

the Great Pee Dee, Santee and Savannah have reverted to primal wetlands, ideal haunts for wild boar weighing up to seven hundred pounds with razor sharp tusks, beady eyes and bad attitudes. That's the beast I was going after armed only with a pointed stick—a high-tech carbon stick tipped with finely honed steel, but only a pointed stick nonetheless.

Uneasy Feelings

As I drove south on '95, I had uneasy feelings. On one hand, I knew my new Parker crossbow would send an arrow, or "bolt" in crossbow terminology, pretty much where I wanted it to go at a blistering 320 feet per second. It is topped with a Triple Dot scope that shows three illuminated red dots for sighting on targets at 20, 30 and 40 yards. After a few hours

of target practice, I had no problem piercing a tennis ball more often than not at 20 and 30 yards.

On the other hand, a wild boar is no tennis ball. I was uneasy because my crossbow, in my hands, might not live up to its name. The latest model Parker crossbow that I was carrying is called "The Terminator."

There were two very good reasons for my uneasiness. First, I'd never hunted with archery equipment before, so I had no firsthand knowledge of what it could really do. Second, I *had* hunted wild boar before and knew for a fact they do not go down easy. Not so long ago I had watched a large black boar vanish into a South Carolina swamp just before dark after what I thought was a well-placed shot with a .50 caliber black powder rifle.

I still have night sweat memories of standing there trying to decide what to do and finally following his blood trail into the hummocks and black water in the fast-fading light, six-cell flashlight in one hand, .357 Magnum pistol in the other. The blood trail lead in a tight circle, and I found him lying in wait near the point where I had first entered the swamp, at the point where he had come to cover his back trail and meet up with me to even the score. Fortunately for me, his 400-pound system shut down before he could get back in touch.

Boar Facts

Most Virginia hunters I know don't know much about wild boar in the Southeast.

—Desoto dropped off the first bunch in the Florida swamps as a food source in 1539. Florida estimates a population of 450,000 animals, and there are plenty of others farther up the coast in Georgia and South Carolina.

—These are not barnyard pigs. They are mixed bloods, hogs gone wild over the centuries and crossbred with European strains turned loose by sporting clubs. Colors range from pure black to brown to striped to calico—but they are all wild.

—Boars will eat anything—nuts, berries, roots, dead fish, snakes, crops... . It's said they'll even eat their young. I've been told that an old rogue boar would love nothing more than to have his grandkids for lunch. Piglets find out early that the Good Book is right: There are only the quick and the dead.

—Piglets weigh only a few pounds to start but will grow to 100 pounds within a year. Good-sized boars are 150 to 400 pounds. Coming face to snout with a 700-pound boar in the Southeast is a distinct, and sobering, possibility.

—A guide once told me that if I get to choose between running from a raging bull in an open pasture or an angry sow



The author waits high up in tall timber for boar.

with piglets in the swamp, “Pick the bull. You might live to tell the story.”

—A mature boar has little to fear except guys like me who only hunt what they can eat. In this day of factory farming and tasteless pork, wild boar is the real thing.

Roblyn’s Neck Trophy Club

I had called Campbell Coxe to sign on for a few days of boar hunting at Roblyn’s Neck Trophy Club. His family has owned 20,000 acres along the Great Pee Dee River near Darlington, including RNTC and Plumfield Plantation, for five generations. Quality and reputation are his top priorities whether growing heirloom rice or providing a first-class hunting experience.

For twenty years RNTC has had a strict Deer Quality Management Program on its 14,000 acres—shoot no bucks with less than 15-inch antler spreads. If you do, you pay \$100 for every inch of mistake. Hunters took 125 big bucks last season which proves the program is working. They also took over 275 wild boar, which is why I drove down.

RNTC is no high-fenced guaranteed kill operation for lazy sports with fat wallets. Far, far from it. I’m partial to hunting end-of-the-road locations, the far edges and borderlands. RNTC is as wild as any place I have been this side of Alaska or the Australian Outback. Less than a mile past the main gate, your cell phone dies, and you still have three miles to go. At the end of the road you’ll find a modern lodge with satellite TV but no phone line.

As you drive in it’s hard at first to believe all the swamp and timber was once open cotton fields. It gets clearer in your mind’s eye when you come across an earthen dike tangled with scrub and vines, part of a levee system that stretched to the Atlantic, every foot dug by hand by slaves. In those dikes are 10,000-year-old Clovis spear points. At RNTC you hunt on hal-
lowed ground.

Hunt Highlights

In *Arctic Dreams* Barry Lopez describes hunting as a state of mind, not a rational exercise. He says to forget about what something “means” when hunting and only be concerned that it “is.” To describe a hunt then is to relate the “is” and hope that it conveys the hunter’s state of mind. Heady stuff, but I’ll try.

Day 1 Afternoon

—After a five-hour drive from Richmond and another hour to stow my gear at the lodge, my RNTC guide, Myron Byrd, has me up a tree. I sit fifteen feet up in a treestand over a game trail in tall timber, crossbow on my lap. A good place to be when the rattlesnakes are beginning their fall feeding binge.

—Deer and turkeys tip-toe by below me throughout the afternoon. As evening approaches four mixed color young boars scour the forest floor for food, grunting and jostling each other. None are close to “knee high,” RNTC’s minimum shooting size.

—Night falls. No hurry. Three hunts to go.

Day 1 Evening

—The New York mob checks into the lodge, Nicky, Tommy and Vinny. They sound a little like Tony Soprano’s cousins but turn out to be big in investment banking, construction and publishing, including *The Outdoors Yellow Pages*. You’ve got to love guys who travel with salamis and olives from Vincenzo’s Pork Store on Staten Island and carry their own family labeled wine that they press themselves at Toms River on the Jersey Shore.

—Camp Chef Danny Lee offers grilled beef tips, herbed aromatic rice with portabello mushroom sauce, a peach cobbler to die for... . Sleep comes early and easy.

Day 2 Morning

—Guide Myron has me high up in a new treestand before first light. Vague shapes ghost by below me. Boar? Deer? Too dark to tell. As the sky lightens nothing moves but squirrels and crows. Must have fed last night by the moon. Later, a distant rifle shot. A goomba make a hit? I’m still feeling OK at pick-up time; two hunts to go.

East Coasters Tom Bilotti(l) and Nick Ponzio (r) with Guide Myron Byrd and Pee Dee catfish





The author with Parker crossbow and Roblyn's Neck boar

Day 2 Early Afternoon

—Nicky got lucky: Nice buck hanging in the cooler with an on-the-money 15-inch spread.

—Too hot for a dove hunt so New York tries for Pee Dee catfish. Tommy gets very lucky and hauls in an 80-pounder. “Biggest fish I evah, evah, evah caught!” he grins, hoisting half the fish for the camera. “I hear that a lot,” dead-pans guide Myron, holding up his end.

Day 2 Late Afternoon

—Another new treestand, above a logging road, a small food plot in front and the swamp behind. Feels like a good place.

—I hear deep grunting and rustling leaves and slip off the crossbow safety. The loudest but littlest pig yet comes out on the road. Ankle high runt of the litter with a voice like a ticked-off James Earl Jones.

—Sun setting. Just before dark I hear more grunting and stomping deep in the swamp. The runt again? Then all is quiet as Myron's headlights appear. One more hunt. Feels right to come back here in the morning.

Day 2 Evening

—Bone-tired but can't miss dinner: tenderloin of Nicky's buck with black currant sauce, dirty rice, sweet coleslaw, rosemary and garlic Journey Cakes washed down with Toms River Red followed by a mysterious custard pie hinting of sweet potatoes and peanut butter that makes me smile.

Final Morning

—Back on the same stand long before dawn. I'm OK if nothing comes in. The hunt's been good.

—At first light a young boar tempts fate. It's not 30 feet from the tip of my bolt to the bulls-eye behind his shoulder. About knee-high, maybe 100 pounds...but I pass the shot. Still time yet.

—An hour later I'm thinking I should have taken the shot. Ten little piggies frolic in the food plot, milling about and bumping each other for fun. They're cute. Then they suddenly turn in unison and freeze, all ears and noses turned toward the swamp behind me... then they squeal and bolt!

—A seamless scene: a black and white boar trotting stiffly out of the swamp

and grunting angrily after the piglets and the Terminator safety flipping off and the top red dot locking onto the sweet spot behind his shoulder as he quarters away and “twang-thunk” and he is gone—but not far.

The Parker Terminator proved to be as effective and humane a hunting weapon as I had ever used. From the point of impact, the boar traveled less than 30 yards. A good thing for Myron and me because we had to drag its 180-pound bulk out of the swamp to his truck.

As I drove north on '95 that afternoon, with two full coolers visible in my rear view mirror, I dreamed of good things to come: North Carolina pit-cooked barbecue, slow-smoked ribs, Polish Bigos, or perhaps Cinghiale in Scottiglia as my Tuscany-loving friend suggests. Maybe I'll start with my own favorite Spanish recipe for Pierna di Jabali from the 1939 edition of C.H. Barker's *The Gentleman's Companion: Around the World with Knife, Fork and Spoon*. Maybe I'll start with that tonight. Why wait for good things to come?

Give the special hunter in your life a gift certificate for a hunt at RNTC. Wild boar specials are offered January-March. Check www.roblynsneck.com for all their hunts. Also check www.cprice-sales@aol.com for aromatic rice and other Plumfield Plantation products. Perfect stocking stuffers for outdoor foodies.

A crossbow, like the one I gave myself, is another great gift for the hunter. Check www.parkerbows.com to see what they make in Mint Springs, Virginia, or go to your nearest sporting goods store such as Clark Brothers in Warrenton and Dance's Sporting Goods in Colonial Heights.

The author is an outdoorsman, farmer and international management consultant whose travels often take him to the far edges and borderlands.