

# Folsom Prison turkeys

Johnny Cash startled me awake. My eyes tried to adjust to the ray of light pouring onto the ceiling. Some-time during the night, my phone had fallen halfway under the bed,



Pine Knot News Outdoors

Bret Baker

The plan was to set up quietly in the darkness. Hopefully, we would intercept the turkeys as they moved from their high roost toward the field as the sun broke free of the horizon.

adding to my confusion. "I bet there's rich folks eatin' in a fancy dining car ..." My mind searched for order and meaning. "They're probably drinkin' coffee and smokin' big cigars ..." My hands fumbled to silence Mr. Cash. 3:55 in the morning. Late April. "But I know I had it comin' I know I can't be free." In an instant, everything snapped into focus. My daughter Hannah and I had a date with a flock of turkeys.

By the time I loaded the truck, Hannah poked her head into the garage. Her face was blackened with camo paint, and her eyes gleamed with excitement. This would be our first turkey hunt together, and we both were anxious to hit the road. We headed south out of Cloquet towards Mahtowa and the fields we had permission to hunt. As I drove, I let fly some yelps, clucks, purrs, and advice. I walked Hannah through the hunt. We talked about the walk in, where we would set the blind, how the decoys would be arranged, and how and when we would use our turkey calls.

Gravel crunched under the truck's tires as we coasted to a stop. We still had an hour until legal shooting light, but we had our work cut out for us. Our style of turkey hunting would weigh us down with gear.

Hannah would lug her chair and shooting sticks. I would sherpa the rest. Over my back, I strung a large Double Bull blind. Crammed near the top of the blind's bag was a jake decoy and a hen decoy.

Hanging over my right shoulder I slung a backpack. The pack held the poles needed to set the decoys along with other essentials: a small case of camo face paint, a box of shells, turkey calls, and some bribing snacks to keep Hannah in the blind a little later into the morning. I grabbed my chair in one hand and Hannah's 20-gauge in the other.

We walked in complete darkness and silence. The stars were still out but rushing to retreat before the dawn. The weight of my cargo strained my back as we trudged amidst the dark shadows cast by the red pines lining the edge of the field. A half moon illuminated the expanse of the hayfield before us. We ducked down a well-worn four-wheeler trail and popped into a small clover-lined opening on the peak of a small ridge. This was the spot.

I set our gear just off the edge of the opening. Hannah grabbed the decoys and poles and paced off 15 yards into the clearing. I began to unpack the blind. The blind would serve us well, hiding our movement as the turkeys approached. I began to pop out the walls of the hub-style blind. I climbed inside the blind and quickly grew frustrated. I began thrashing. The blind attacked me from all sides. As soon as I popped out one side, another collapsed. What looked like a simple maneuver on YouTube was turning into a sick sort of hellish origami. By the time the blind was positioned, Hannah was giggling and I was sweating. Any turkeys that watched the struggle from their roost that morning still talk about it.

We set up our chairs and arranged our shooting lanes. Hannah prepared herself, her gun, and her wits. We finally settled into the silence. A quick glance at my phone: still a half hour until legal shooting light. Perfect. There was an ease that entered the blind. All the work was done, and we could sit back and enjoy

the woods as they came alive around us. The decoys became more and more visible. As I slid my turkey call past my lips, instinctively it settled into the roof of my mouth. I wanted to let any birds within earshot know there was a hen strutting and pecking at the bugs and roots atop the ridge. Yelp, yelp, I called.

"I'm cold." Hannah pronounced as the yelps dissipated into the grey air. Speaking my native Minnesotan I asked, "Are you like cold, cold?" She



Hannah Baker is ready for the hunt.

was. She shivered and shook. Her teeth chattered as her gun barrel danced out the portal of the blind. It was just turning to first light, and I knew it was time to go.

The clock in my truck read 6:05 a.m. Hannah and I had made our way out of the woods and to the Little Store in Barnum. We sat with the heater on high, sipping our hot chocolate. Hannah thanked me for taking her turkey hunting. I smiled, thankful for the morning. Thankful for her.

*Bret Baker is a lifetime resident of Cloquet. He is a proud husband, father, educator and outdoorsman. Bret began guiding fishing trips when he was 16 years old. Today, in his 40s, his passion is to introduce people to the tremendous outdoor adventures available in our region.*

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