

So a quadriplegic in a blind guy go into a deer stand...



I thought I had a pretty good idea of what lay ahead of us but as often happens, most things surpassed even my imagination. We arrived at Hogsback Ranch outside of Gilman Wisconsin Friday evening for a meet and greet of our hosts for the upcoming hunt. I don't know if I've ever felt so at home so quickly in a new place. Within moments of meeting, we have a new group of people I'm proud to consider friends. That feeling only grew throughout the weekend.

The adventure actually began a few years back when a buddy of mine, Ralph Barten, came up with the idea that we should harvest a deer together. We've each got a bit of the disability but Ralph figured that with a little teamwork, it might just work. See, I'm quadriplegic and Ralph is blind. His idea was that I would be his eyes and he would be my hands. I was intrigued but knew that wasn't going to be simple. Ralph has been a successful hunter for several years with the assistance of a spotter looking over his shoulder guiding him to aim the gun correctly. I couldn't do that because the only way to get his shoulder close enough to me was to have him sit in my lap and that was NOT going to happen in this case. LOL!

That is where my son Riley came on board. We borrowed a small bracket called an Iscope that fastens to the back of the scope to hold an iPhone. It works well with an iPhone in good light to take video through the scope. Unfortunately, we were going to be hunting out of a dark shooting house and it simply couldn't gather enough light for a viewable picture. Riley found a way to attach a small web cam to the bracket and hooked it up to his laptop. We were set! Ralph came to visit and we shot some paper to make sure and we were off.

Saturday morning consisted of interviews for the show we were going to be on, Outward Bound TV with Kurt Walbeck. Kurt also outfits for a variety of big-game in Alberta. Professional but very laid-back so I knew we would enjoy our time together in the stand. Program should air the latter part of November. It's a Midwestern ABC channel but they do put the show on YouTube right after it airs so I can get a link for you to check out when the time comes. Meanwhile their site is <http://outdoorbound.tv/index.html/>.

Once the camera work was done we headed for the stand. It was a bit daunting to say the least! It was elevated 6 feet and had a 10 foot ramp so if you can imagine me and my 300 pound power chair, you'll



understand why no one had a free hand for snapshots on the way up but here's how we started. I know the camera was rolling so hopefully that will be on the show. Up was a lot of work for everybody but by the end of the night we figured out how to rappel the chair back down so I felt decidedly safer.

By Saturday's hunt, I think we were all a lot more confident and by the end of the hunt it was work but very doable. We weren't in the stand more than an hour or so when the first nice buck appeared on the food plot. Very tempting but it was early. About 45 min. later we learned that was a good choice when we got to watch one of those dream bucks that scored almost 250 inches! I don't know how long we watched him but it sure made the evening go quickly. Here is Jerry, a hunter from Louisiana that harvested his 240 inch shortly before we arrived. Jerry was kind enough to let us snap these pictures so you can get an idea what Hogsback can produce.



Just as the light was starting to fade, a good shooter buck showed up. Riley's invention worked just as it should but the story is far from over I'm afraid. Here's the shot

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oj0BGv_tYQc&feature=youtu.be

Right at the end of the video you can catch the muzzle flash, then the recoil messes up camera position. We were able to watch him run for quite a ways before he hit the woods and we begin to feel just a little bit nervous as he looked just fine.... Quietly, we replayed the footage and saw that everything looked okay. A couple of the guys slipped down to find the trail but there wasn't a drop of blood or a piece of hair. Another hour of quiet search where we saw him go and it was time to slip of the area and let him be till morning.

The morning tracking showed absolutely nothing so it was off to the range to see what was going on with Ralph's scope. A couple shots proved why that buck was untouched. Somehow things must've gotten jostled awfully hard on the way to the stand because it was shooting 6 inches high and 6 inches right! I'm so glad we didn't wound him.

A quick lunch and it was time to get back in the stand again. I was relieved to know the bullet would go where the crosshairs were this time. We were ready to do it right this time or so we thought. The deer moved really late. We did get some footage of one of the incredible ones. It's here:

<http://youtu.be/1maoT2Qt4rw>

Watching him made the trip for me! 250 inches of bone and is only three years old. Obviously not mother nature's handiwork but still so cool to watch. The shooter bucks moved really late and we were almost out of daylight. That would've been okay but the laptop I was viewing was almost out of battery life as well. We did get a hurried shot before dark but didn't manage to connect.

We needed to be home the next day but we left with the open invitation to come try again when we could. Before trying again, we had some bugs to work out with our shooting set up and our communication prior to the shot. Between Riley and a friend of mine, our camera adaptation was fine tuned. We got my rifle shooting hairsplitting groups and Ralph and I smoothed out our communication. Almost before I knew it, we were on the road again to give it one more shot.

Up the ramp and into the shooting house we went with more confidence than we had started with. It was a beautiful afternoon for November and by the time Riley had all equipment in place, the first doe stepped onto the food plot. The rut was beginning to heat up and it wasn't long before a buck chased her off into the woods. A short time later, another deer appeared right next to the stand. A buck and a good one at that! He worked his way around front of us right where he needed to be but he was close, almost too close for Ralph and I to communicate. Ever so carefully Ralph adjusted his rifle to my barely whispered directions. Here is the shot

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0L0gRmJAjzQ&feature=youtu.be>

And here's the result



My thanks to the terrific folks at Hogsback ranch for giving us this opportunity. If you are looking for a hunting preserve in central Wisconsin, this place is first-rate and you'll never need a kinder group of people. <http://www.hogsbackranch.com/> we arrived as strangers but we quickly became friends and left as family. Thanks as well to The Way Outfitters and Disabled Sportsman Magazine for setting this up. My special thanks to my son Riley who not only made everything work but made it a wonderful adventure!

