

# Organic Hunting

(Literally)

A True Story

I slipped outside in the dark in the early AM and took it in. The moon early this morning was full or damn close to it. The temperature was around 24 degrees F and dry snow covered the ground. The sky was crystal clear.

This was one of those times when I knew what I must do. I had done it before, many times, especially when I was growing up and running a trap line. I had avoided church innumerable times on Sunday mornings like this. This time, no Sunday and no trap line.

It was clear. I must go into the back country under the guise of hunting, and find the most isolated place I could walk to. It was the only sensible thing to do.

I climbed a trail up out of a gorgeous mountain valley with a fast flowing stream and into the high country swamps on top. Fresh snow fell off every branch I touched. Beech leaves still clinging to brushy branches dumped dry snow on my head.

Humans had forsaken this trail for many years. My thoughts went back to my kids. It was not as easy to travel as it had been with two little boys in tow many years ago. Beech brush littered the trail now. We had hunted on this ridge once, before they were old enough to carry guns. We had climbed this trail early in the morning and hunted those bear swamps on the top of the ridge until dark, coming down as dusk settled into the valley. There was no deer shot, but it had been a beautiful, snowy day. We had seen no one and what was even better, we had heard no one. Lots of memories.

Once on top, I found the first swamp opening and settled in to wait and listen, calling turkey several times to no avail. After a bit, I started a dried hemlock twig fire and just sat there drinking coffee, remembering the times we had done that, cooking our lunch while we hunted. Then I began moving again, very slowly, along the dark, hemlock rim of the lowest swamp. Every step was measured...balanced. The dry snow cushion had given me an almost completely noiseless ability...at least to my ears.

At a point where I could see ahead north some distance, I stopped and scanned ahead of me. At the same time I felt pressure building, I mean real pressure. I was going to expel gas. Well, I thought, why not utilize it?

*An aside here: Some years ago I had begun walking a property (doing a Stewardship Plan) with Bose, my big German shepherd of that time. It had been a Saturday in May. I had realized too late that it was also the last day of spring gobbler season and I was walking a 300 acre property of an absentee landowner. There would probably be someone hunting the property. That was a given. As I walked, I expelled gas. Immediately I got an answer from a guy who didn't sound very much like a turkey, but he thought I was a turkey! Aside from being embarrassing, that could be dangerous. It happened again (involuntarily) and he answered again! By this time, Bose had located our human turkey and was standing next to him wagging his tail. I walked up and asked him how things were going. He told me that he had been calling a turkey in prior to my arrival.*

*Well, I set him straight. Anyway, he was quite embarrassed and got up and left... After he was gone, I thought about it. I wondered if anyone had ever called a turkey*

*hunter in this manner? I thought not. Anyway, I contacted Arnie Haden, the PA Game Commission turkey biologist at that time. Arnie was a good guy and a friend. I thought maybe he would put it in PA Game News. I figured it would liven that magazine up a little bit. He thought not.*

So, standing there with the shotgun at ready, I thought...why not? I let out a controlled yelp (I have certain ability here) and then several more. I immediately saw movement. It was a coyote! He was coming towards me, hiding as he came. He had not seen me yet. I stood with the gun up, waiting for his head to appear. Several times I caught glimpses of him as he came closer. At last there was no more cover. He would need to dash in the open towards me. Nothing happened. Then, without any warning he was sprinting away to the east and into the swamp. Perhaps he had smelled me (a disadvantage of using an organic call). In a way, I was glad. It had been a fantastic experience just having the coyote approach me. How many times can you do that?

In the end, I was out-foxed by a coyote or maybe it was out-coyoted by a coyote. In any case, I wonder if the PA Game News will take this one? I bet it's another first.

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