

Two Alabamians' Going for the Gold

The Gould Turkey was thought to be extinct some 15 or more years ago. I met a man from Chihuahua Mexico named Enrique Marquez. Enrique had found thousands of Gould Turkeys in the Sierra Madras Mountains. According to Enrique, he sent 40 DNA samples of 40 different Gould Turkeys to a University in North Arizona. He did this to prove to the US authorities that he did indeed have plenty of Gould Turkeys. Every one of these samples was tested to be full-blooded Goulds. When I discovered this information, I knew this was the outfitter I wanted to book with. I wanted to hunt with him soon, before his territory was exploited by other eager Turkey hunting enthusiasts like myself.

We left Atlanta at 10:00 a.m. and after a layover in Houston we landed in Chihuahua Mexico 5 hours later. Enrique, our outfitter, got Eddy and I through customs without any problems. When we got to Enrique's suburban it had a flat tire. Our cook, Juan Lara, had the tire changed by the time we got all of our luggage loaded. We took the flat tire into the town of Chihuahua and had it fixed.

We drove three and one half-hours, on mostly paved roads to a town called Nvo Casas Grandes which means New Large Houses. In route there, we came to a roadblock. There were Mexican Federales who were stopping all vehicles. They had M16's and AR15's either strapped to their back or holding them in their hands. Now we had two vehicles filled with fourteen large bags and five ice coolers. The two vehicles in front of us had been completely emptied and were being searched. They had even taken out the spare tires and were testing the air in them. I knew we were in trouble. Not because we had anything that was illegal, but because of the time required to empty every bag and explain what everything was. When it was our turn, Enrique immediately got both the shotguns and their paper work. He confronted the most difficult items first and up front. He told the Feds that we were hunting El CoCono, that is Turkey for you non-Spanish speaking readers. The Feds didn't know what a Turkey was. Enrique showed them a picture. After seeing the picture, they let us go with out checking another bag.

That night, we had a real Mexican dinner at Los Arcos Restuarante, which means the Arches Restaurant. It had a McDonald's like double arch in front of the parking lot, but it looked nothing like any McDonald's I've ever been too. We checked into a hotel for the night.

The next morning we ate a Mexican omelet and were off to our camp. There had been a killing in the town of El Larjo, The Large, which was the most direct route to camp. We had gotten word that the Mexican Federales had surrounded the town and were checking every vehicle that went into and out of the town. They were confiscating all weapons found. Eddy and I were hunting with bows but there were two other hunters who were gun hunting. We had to take a different route to avoid El Larjo.

Now if you have never ridden far into the rural areas of Mexico, let me tell you. There are very few paved roads and that's using the word paved liberally. The only other way to our

camp was to circle way around on dirt, pig trails, over and on top of a huge mountain range. We rode seven and one half-hours on the most rugged, remote, narrow, pig trails, I have ever been on. We were traveling through the most remote, wilderness, mountain range you can imagine. But, every few miles, on the side of the trail, was a doghouse like building with a picture or statue of Mary, Jesus' mother. It also had various other religious relicts in them. The most puzzling item in these houses was that there were several lit candles. I have no idea how or who lit them.

Like I said, after seven and one half-hours, we got to camp. We were hunting on some land owned by Hectar Villa. He is a relative of Poncho Villa. Poncho is considered a hero in Mexico for attacking Texas and fighting the USA when there was still a dispute over territory. This piece of property was over 42,000 acres.

Eddy and I rushed to the woods to scout and put up our blind for the morning hunt. We found a spot that looked like a natural crossing. It had many turkey tracks. We put up the blind and went back to camp. Eddy and I filled our air mattresses and found a flat spot between three small spruce trees, to break the wind. We were going to be sleeping under the stars without a tent.

Juan Lara cooked us T-bone steaks, salad, mushroom soup, and baked potatoes. It was delicious. With our Bellies filled, Eddy and I were ready for bed. That night it was cold. I didn't bring a good sleeping bag with me. That was a MISTAKE. I got very cold. I was up, several times during the night trying to stay warm.

By 5:30 a.m., Eddy and I were set up. Eddy was in the blind and I was set up thirty yards behind him. We had decided that Eddy would shoot the first bird. At 6:08 we heard our first bird gobble. We heard at least four gobblers maybe six. They were on a creek bottom, way below us. The birds were answering us. They flew from their roost and went straight to the water. They were quiet for about 45 minutes while they drank. After they drank, we were able to crank them back up. One bird circled behind Eddy. He appeared to be coming. After about 30 to 45 minutes of steady gobbling, he shut up. It was quiet for over an hour. The we heard a bird gobble over one half mile to the right of our Blind. Eddy and I walked to within 100 yards of the bird. We made one sequence of yelping and ran toward our blind. After about 150 yards, we did it again. The bird gobbled every time and was following us. We finally got to the blind and before we could get set up, the bird gobbled four more times.

By now he was about 200 yards away, but coming fast. We were finally set up and Eddy made a soft yelp. The bird double gobbled. After about 90 seconds, the bird gobbled again, so I yelled to him. The bird double gobbled. The next time he gobbled, we could tell that he was circling around and was going to come in a different route than what we had anticipated. I decided not to call anymore because if the Turkey came straight to me from where he was now, Eddy would not get a shot. Eddy stuck his head out of the back of his blind and threw his voice back to his left. This worked perfectly. It brought the bird straight to the front of the blind, Eddy and I could see the bird coming. He was strutting and gobbling most of the way. When the bird got 19 yards, Eddy let him have 2216 shaft. I never heard the shot, but I saw the bird run off. At first, I thought something had spooked the bird. As soon as I saw the body language of Eddy, as he barreled out of the blind, I knew then what had happened. Eddy said, If he hadn't made a 12 shot it was certainly a 10. This is the scoring of the 12 to 10 ring of a McKenzie Turkey target. We found Eddy's arrow and two minutes later, within 50 yards of the blind; laid the largest Gould Turkey I had ever seen.

We took some pictures and packed the bird back to camp. Eddy skinned out his bird, while I got my bow and arrows ready for the afternoon hunt. Another hunter named Mike, a hunter from Canada, had four opportunities that morning but was unsuccessful. Johnny, the other hunter killed his Gould with Enrique's 12 gage. After the first morning hunt, two of four hunters were done.

The next morning I hunted in the same spot Eddy had hunted the day before. This morning the birds had roosted across the canyon. We were on one mountain and the birds where on the other. We called to the boss Tom for two hours and forty-five minutes. He gobbled an average of eight to ten times every minute. If you do the math, he gobbled over 1300 times. We attempted to circle back and tried to get on that side of the mountain. We left him gobbling as we circled back. We got to the truck and drove to the other mountain. When we got there, the gobbler had stopped. When we got back to camp, Mike, the Canadian, had shot his bird. We found out that one of the Mexican guides had walked over to the bird we were after. He probably spooked him and that's why he had stopped gobbling.

The next morning, Eddy and I set up on the mountain where we heard the bird the morning before. I am the only hunter in camp now who hadn't shot his bird. At daylight, we heard him gobble. He was across the canyon on the other mountain where we were the day before. We got him fired up, but he would not cross the canyon. That same morning, Hecktar's son Everett shot a very nice bird.

That afternoon, Hecktar took me to the other side of his ranch. It was one hour and forty-five minutes drive from camp. Once we got there, I could tell this was **the** place. It had more tracks and more strut marks than any place I have ever been to in my life. Once inside the blind, Eddy called in a hen and small gobbler. Forty-five minutes later he called in two large gobblers. They came to the back of my blind within five yards of my blind. They swung around. I could finally see them. The first one had a nine-inch beard and the second one had about an eleven-inch maybe a twelve-inch beard. Through my radio, Eddy said, "The one on the right, the one on the right."

The one on the right was the twelve incher. He was huge. By the time they were in clear view of one of my shooting windows, they were seven yards, but I thought the blind had blocked the view of the video camera. I was waiting for the birds to take fifteen more steps in the direction they were headed. This would have given me a fifteen to twenty yard shot, right in front of the camera. Eddy was filming the hunt. Before I knew it, they had turned right, and were going away from me and worst of all, they were in a blind spot between two of my shooting windows.

I was at full draw. I could hear Eddy through my radio head set saying, "What are you waiting on? The one on the right Bob, the one on the right!" Finally, I could see the birds. Bob the one on the right, Eddy said again. The birds were about thirty two to thirty three yards away, quartering away. I took careful aim and began to slowly squeeze the trigger on my release. When my release had gone off, all chaos broke loose. I felt something slap the right side of my head. I heard a loud clang sound. My arrow was Dolphin tailing and went very low. When my release went off, the nock on my bowstring had grabbed the wire from my radio to my head set. It jerked the headset off my head and tangled the wire in my bowstring. This caused tremendous drag on the thrust of my bow causing the arrow to travel at a much slower speed; consequently resulting in a very low shot. The two gobblers jumped at the noise and trotting fifteen-yard further away. I knocked another arrow called to them

with my mouth call and took full draw. Both birds stopped and gobbled. They were now at fifty-five yards and facing directly away from me. I took aim and gapped my fifty-and sixty-yard pins.

As I burned the gap on the back of the biggest bird, I had second thoughts. I knew this was a record book Gould. I didn't want to wound the bird or frighten him too much. I still had one more day of hunting and now I knew where this big boy was living. I let down my bow and called to them again. They both gobbled and turned back toward me. They began to strut. They took four steps toward me and gobbled again. I yelped, ever so lightly. They both gobbled, then gobbled again, then triple gobbled. I was breathing way to hard to make a fifty-two yard shot. My heart was in my throat. It was pumping so hard; I could feel the throbbing in my fingertips against my release. A hen began to yelp on the other side of the gobblers. They both double gobbled. They turned and began to walk toward the hen. I yelped. They gobbled and began to strut. They continued to walk and strut and gobble toward the hen right out of sight. I could hear all three of them for another forty-five minutes as they walked to their roosting tree. About 30 to 45 minutes before dark, I heard them fly up to roost. While on the roost, I heard them gobble over 400 times. I knew where I was hunting the next morning.

When I got to the truck, Everett, the landowner's son, had shot another Turkey. This was two in one day for him. Eddy had shown him how to use a box call and he was getting good at it. Both his birds had one-inch spurs, which is extremely large for mountain Goulds. They both had 10 inch beards and weighed 19 and 20 pounds.

That night we stayed at the landowner's cabin. He didn't have electricity but he did have gravity fed pluming. They fired up the wood burning hot water heater. We all took baths. It sure felt good to be clean again.

At 3:45 a.m. I was wide-awake. I couldn't sleep, thinking about that Grande Cocono (Huge Turkey). At 4:00 a.m. I woke the cook and my driver. Mike went with us. He decided to kill a second bird. We ate some apple oatmeal and by 4:30 a.m., we were in the truck. We packed lunches and water, just in case. We wanted to hunt all day. At 5:40 a.m., the truck was parked and we were on foot. By 6:00 a.m. I was at my blind and both gobblers were already hammering. They were both still where I had roosted them, 500 yards directly in front of my blind. I began to tree yelp. They both hammered. Then the hen cranked in with a very raspy yelp. Both gobblers, triple gobbled. I got my raspiest call out. I wasn't about to be out done by some raspy hen. I cranked an aggressive cackle, followed by the raspiest yelp you ever heard. They both tripled then tripled again, then gasped for breath and tripled again. I got my "The Wing Thing" out. At 6:45 a.m. I gave a fly down cackle and simulated a bird flying down using the wing thing. They both triple gobbled. I yelped one more time and then shut up. They couldn't stand it. They gobbled non-stop for 5 minutes, then they pitched down. Once they hit the ground, they were both gobbling. They were coming right to me. Then I heard the old raspy hen start yelping. This hurried the gobblers up. I gave my raspy yep; they gobbled and continued coming.

When they got within 100 yards of me, another Gobbler to my left began to crank in. The other 2 gobblers shut up. This is usually a sign that the dominant bird just came home. The bird to my left was not gobbling as much as the other 2 had been, but none the less he was coming. My adrenaline went into over drive. Two minutes later, I could see him. He was at 50 yards full shut. He looked huge. The other two birds began to gobble again. The bird in front of me never made a sound. He started staring right at me. It was now 7:00 a.m. The

other two birds gobbled. Then I saw a hen right behind the gobbler who was standing in front of me. I drew my bow. He was at 30 yards facing me. The hen yelped. The gobbler bowed up and fanned out. Just as I was burning my 30-yard pin on his chest, I realized something was wrong with his tail feathers. Now I wanted to shoot this bird, don't get me wrong, but not only was I going to eat him, but also most importantly, I wanted to get him mounted. I let my bow down to see what was wrong with his tail feathers. He was missing two tail feathers right together on his left side. This left a large gap in his fan. The other two birds were gobbling harder than ever. I decided to pass on this bird. It was still early only 7:00 a.m. I knew both the other two birds had perfect tail feathers because I had seen them the day before. And the largest one would score very high in the record book. The hen went to my left and the gobbler followed her right back from where he had come from.

The other two birds were still gobbling, but now they were about 300 yards away. I could hear old raspy leading them away. Called as I might, I could not turn them. I toiled with them for over an hour. I would pull them a little toward me and old raspy would pull them away. By 8:05 a.m. everything around me was silent. I could hear the occasional gobble far off, but for the most part, it was dead around me. By 10:00 a.m. I had called up another jake, one tom with about a four inch beard and then later a Tom with about a six inch beard. Between the three birds, I had heard only one gobble. They all three came in very quietly. At 10:15 a.m. I heard a gobble behind me. This day had been by far the hottest day of them all. I was sweating profusely in my blind. I yelped and he did not respond. I heard a gobble way off in front of me. I yelped aggressively at him. There was silence. Five minutes later the one in front gobbled again but still way off. I yelped again. And again nothing. Silence for ten minutes and the bird behind me finally gobbled again. He was a little closer. I yelped and no response. I began a soft high pitch purr and again no response. Silence for 30 minutes. At 11:00 a.m. the bird that was behind me finally gobbled again but now he was circling around me and was to my left. I did not respond this time at all. At 11:30 a.m. he finally came in. The bird only had a four-inch beard. He didn't stay long and by 11:33 a.m. he was gone.

I had noticed a pattern to most of these birds and the route they seem to take when they would approach my blind. At 12:00 noon I moved my blind in hopes of getting a closer shot. At 12:30 p.m. the blind was in place. Since it was my last day, I decided to hunt all day. I climbed in the blind for the afternoon hunt. At 3:15 p.m. I heard some hens, so I began to communicate with them. I was making some lost hen calls and some purrs. At 3:30 p.m. the first hen appeared in front of my blind and began to feed. One minute later two more hens joined her. About two minutes later, a Raven began to crow, straight over head. Just as soon as the Raven crowed, I heard a gobble to my right and then another. It was the two gobblers I had missed the day before. My pulse rate doubled in a matter of one second. I didn't have a lot of time to get too nervous. Two minutes later, they were both in front of the blind. I determined which one had the longest beard. You guessed it, the one on the right. They both started feeding with the hens. The one on the right was 21 yards away quartering toward me. I drew my bow slowly as to not make any noise. I found my twenty-yard pin through my peep sight and burned it on the left front wing shoulder, if turkeys have shoulders. The turkey put his head down to feed. I held the pin and my breath. When he lifted his head back up, I squeezed the trigger on my release. No Radio head phones this time. I could see the arrow as it headed straight for the target. Bullseye!!! The Turkey jumped straight up. All the other birds flew off. The arrow was still in him. He began to run out of sight to my right. The other

gobbler had flown to my left, but then he ran back across in front of me in the same direction as the bird I had shot. I waited 15 minutes. I got out of my blind and knocked another arrow. I walked to my right and the same Raven was circling, thirty-five yards in front of me. Under the circling raven lied my bird. He was beautiful. He had a 12-inch beard and weighed twenty-two pounds. His left spur was 1 inch and his right spur was $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch. I packed all my gear out to the road where the truck was. It was gone. Hectar took the truck back to camp. I used my tripod and the timer on my camera, to take some pictures of me with my turkey.

When I finished taking the pictures, I heard another bird gobble. He was less than 150 yards away from me. Boy this ranch had some turkeys. I popped up my blind, got inside and began to call. It was now 6:00 p.m. I yelped to him and no response. Five minutes later I yelped again. And again no response. At 6:15p.m. he gobbled again. I did not respond. At 7:00 I yelped and a bird gobbled to my right. I yelped again and two more birds gobbled. Now I have one to my left, one in front and one to my right. I yelped one more time and all three gobbled again. I was silent until the bird in front of me gobbled. I answered him with a yelp and all three gobbled again. I was silent until the bird in front of me gobbled again. I answered him with a yelp and all three gobbled again. At 7:25 p.m. it was too late, they were headed to their roost. They were still gobbling, but were getting further and further away. At 7:33 p.m. another gobbler started gobbling to my right. I called to him aggressively and he got really fired up. Unfortunately, he was also headed for the roost. Before the vehicle picked me up, I heard six more different birds gobble. Boy does this Ranch have the birds.

We stayed one more night in Hectar's cabin and then headed back to Chihuahua early the next morning. It took 11 and $\frac{1}{2}$ hours of travel time to get there. On the way we explored some Apache caves and while in NVO Casas Grandes, we toured a one thousand-year-old Inca village. We spent the night in Chihuahua. The next morning we flew back to Atlanta, then drove to our houses in Eufaula