

PRIMLAND PURSUIT

BY MATT LINDLER

Hammers cocked, I waited for at least two gobblers of the four to cross to the right side of the winding mountain logging road. They'd come in side by side with the confidence of the Four Horsemen, strutting toward our decoys, after navigating a wind-fell pine.

One, obviously the boss, engaged the fake hen and climbed upon her back. Chaos ensued as the others took umbrage, and feathers flew while each attempted to play king of the mountain as the others charged the hill.

Defeated, two veered right to challenge the interloper jake we'd positioned behind the hen, and finally presented a shot. "Are you on one?" I asked, and Michael, who had lured the toms for this display, replied affirmative. As per the prearrange agreement, I squeezed the 116-year-old trigger and smoke filled the

air. Michael never shot, because the three remaining birds instantly vanished.

They'd dropped down into a hollow and responded to the fighting purrs and wing flapping mimicked by the former Grand National caller, but they stayed just below the lip of a shelf then faded off down the Virginia mountain.

THE SETTING

We were on a beautiful, private tract on the famous Primland Resort in Meadows of Dan, Virginia. Nestled among steep oak ridges and meandering creek bottoms, Primland is one of the premier golf and resort destinations on the East Coast that doesn't involve a beach of some sort. In contrast, this resort offers trout fishing instead of off shore, bird and clay shooting instead of surfing and mountain homes instead of beach houses.



Bone Collector Michael Waddell connected on an Eastern gobbler at Primland.

Brian Godfrey, NWTf video producer, and I lodged in one of the secluded mountain homes, while Michael and Kristy Waddell enjoyed one of the townhouses close to the main lodge. The mountain homes are spacious and can easily accommodate a large family or group of hunting buddies with full kitchen, a comfortable gathering space and deck overlooking mountain scenery; ours had a billiards/game room separated from the main house.

Primland's lodge is a massive, rustic structure with a pub and fine dining along with other amenities, such as a modern observatory with night-time star gazing, full spa and hotel-style accommodations for those so inclined.

There are activities for the entire family, including horseback trail rides, air gun ranges, tomahawk throwing, you name it. My next trip will definitely include my family.

MICHAEL'S BIRD

Virginia offers all-day turkey hunting, so after photos and high-fives, we headed out in search of a gobbler for Michael. With 10,000

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Nestled among steep oak ridges and creek bottoms, Primland is one of the premier golf and resort destinations on the East Coast that doesn't have a beach.

acres to search, we had plenty of places to locate birds, and after several tries, we finally got one to gobble around the bend in a dirt road, but heading off in another direction. Sammy and Bobby, our tour guides for the trip and skilled turkey hunters to boot, knew a back way to get in front of him, so we circled around and parked the trucks. Knowing Michael's run-and-gun style of hunting doesn't necessarily match my physical ability to keep up in such terrain, I opted to give him some space and allow the hunt to commence with me manning the vehicle.

I stayed in touch via text, and after an hour, they asked me to bring the truck around as the gobbler vanished into the ether without another cluck. Just as I spotted them on the road ahead, I was waved off to stop a couple hundred yards from them, and the crew dropped off the side as the hunt renewed. Ten minutes later, a shotgun's report signaled success, and I crept up to the spot where I'd originally seen them to find smiling faces and a big tom lying in repose on the ground at their feet. Apparently, the strutter decoy Michael deployed was too much for the tom. He came in for a fight but left on a stretcher.

HISTORY REPEATED

On this hunt to the Virginia mountains, I brought with me an old shotgun I'd traded for with my oldest hunting mentor. Made by Husqvarna in 1902, the shotgun spoke to me when I first saw it, and I just knew I had to kill a turkey with it. Both Damascus full-choked barrels are chambered for 2½-inch, 12-gauge paper shells, and the rabbit-ear hammers are paired to double triggers.

Not knowing the pressure capabilities of

the barrels, I opted to handload black-powder shells and tested several recipes until I found one that produced the best pattern at 30 yards. I started with a spent 3-inch high-brass hull and cut it down to 2½ inches using an X-acto knife. I deprimed and brushed out the carbon and reprimed them with Winchester Triple Se7en 409 muzzleloader primers. I roll crimped each shell on my drill press and sealed each of the over-shot cards with Elmers glue to provide some water-resistance.

I pattern tested the following recipes:

- 60 grains of Goex FFFg; 1¼-ounces of No. 6 and No. 5 blend of chilled-lead shot
- 65 grains of Goex FFFg; 1¼-ounces of No.

6 and No. 5 blend of chilled-lead shot

- 70 grains of Goex FFFg; 1¼-ounces of No. 6 and No. 5 blend of chilled-lead shot
- 75 grains of Goex FFFg; 1¼-ounces of No. 6 and No. 5 blend of chilled-lead shot
- 80 grains of Goex FFFg; 1¼-ounces of No. 6 and No. 5 blend of chilled-lead shot

The 80-grain load worked best by far and held a dense, turkey-killing pattern on paper at 30 yards. The pattern was so good, I stretched it out to 35 and 40 yards, but the pattern fell apart by 40, so I determined 35 was my maximum effective range.

Hunting with a historic firearm brings with it a sense of nostalgia and a connection to the early hunters who used a Gibson box or Jordan yelper to lure a tom within range. The only downside is the shotgun has to be thoroughly cleaned with hot, soapy water after being shot, then dried and oiled. It's just like hunting with a muzzleloader, though the open chambers and ability to remove the barrels from the action and stocks makes it a little easier to slip them into the bathtub without wetting the wood. It takes a little effort, but boy is it worth it.

PRIME TIME

Primland might be known for its golf and five-star resort pampering, but its turkey hunting and other outdoor activities are top-shelf as well. The staff is incomparable, and the welcoming heartwarming. If they'd had a red carpet, I believe they would have rolled it out. But don't be selfish about the experience. Bring your family along because it is an adventure made to share. 🐓



The author used a Husqvarna side-by-side from 1902 with hand-loaded ammo to hunt gobblers in Virginia. It held tight patterns out to about 35 yards.