

From My Journal January 23, 2011

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January 23, 2011 woke up this morning to blowing flurries and cold temperatures quite a change from yesterdays' mild conditions. It turned out to be the perfect day in a week of crazy weather to get together with two fellow quail enthusiast and that's exactly what we did.



Dave Young and Tom Laisure

It was still dark outside when I moved to

finally get out of a warm bed, get a cup of coffee, feed the dogs and get my gear organized. Kate (my wife) also got up. She announced to me in her *au fait* way, "You'll need a hearty breakfast if you're going to be out all day." I didn't complain when she placed eggs, ham, grits, toast, orange juice and a fresh cup of coffee in my face because I knew she was right and I would certainly walk it off before the days' conclusion.

I was scheduled to meet two new friends David (Dave) Young and Tom Laisure at the Junction City Wal Mart at 9:00 a.m. Dave and I had been corresponding for several weeks trying to put a hunt together but the crazy Kansas weather and schedules kept getting in our way. Finally a window opened; the weatherperson calling for a sunny; clear day with temperatures reaching the upper thirties before another storm moved in that evening; it look like this might be our last chance; so we seize the moment.

Both the gentlemen were older than me (Dave pushing 70 and Tom pushing 80); so that made me the baby in the trio and that doesn't happen very often.

Dave is an old Vietnam era Air Force veteran who after leaving the service landed a job as a technician with the Associated Press and ended up in Wichita, Kansas where he bought his first bird dog Cara Della, a German shorthair, fell in love with upland bird hunting and I am assuming met and became friends with Tom Laisure his long time hunting partner. He currently resides in Lee's Summit, MO.

Tom Laisure is an old Wichita man. He is one of those quiet; delightful spirits that is both uplifting and contagious to be around. It is absolutely impossible to be around him for more than five minutes without wanting to be his life long friend and I could see why he and Dave had bonded. Dave on the other hand is a robust spirit, full of humor and if the two were a comedy team Tom would be the straight man. They both reminded me of myself and my own long-time hunting partner Tom Kirker. I had a real feeling of special honor being included in one of their outings and they both made me feel as if they had known me for years and I was simply just one of the boys who had taken way too long to show up.

After I had stopped for gas and filled up my two thermoses with coffee I headed for Wal Mart and our scheduled rendezvous. I wanted to be early (I hate people having to wait on me) and arrived ahead of schedule at 8:30 a.m. I guess Dave and Tom hate people having to wait on them too because fifteen minutes later they arrived ahead of schedule and after introductions we drove to Fort Riley's main gate to register our shotguns.

A little side note here. If you plan on hunting Fort Riley on a weekend the Welcome Center is closed but you can register your guns at the main gate for five days only; for the three year registration you'll need to come back when the Center is open or go to the Provost Marshal's office on main post.

I found it interesting but not surprising that all three of us owned Remington 870s. It was after all the gun of choice for my generation. Both Dave and Tom's guns were beautifully decorated Remington wing masters while mine was your everyday Wal Mart special. Tom chose however to shoot a light weight 20 gauge over and under and left the heavier wing master in its case.

After registering our guns Dave, Tom and I headed for the closest hunter check in station at Camp Funston; from there we went to our first location. This location was a snow crusted road that was bordered by prairie grass and a hardwood draw at the bottom. The draw was full of plum thickets, hackberries, evergreens, hedge apples and thorny honey locust. Once we released the dogs (Mattie my four year old German wirehair and Amy Dave's six month old English pointer) we proceeded down the road snow crunching beneath our boots; Dave on my left and Tom (the south paw) on my right full of wasted anticipation. I say wasted because after some forty minutes of hunting both the draw and the road we failed to locate either of the two nice coveys I knew were there.

Our next location was an unplanted field on top of a snow covered ridge with more hardwood bottoms. Around one sloping curve in the field I called Mattie over and had her work an area of grass where I had found birds in the past. She had barely crested the slope when she went on a hard point. That's where we stepped in and flushed the first (about 8 to 10 birds) of four coveys but only one of two that we would get to work. The dog work was perfect with both Mattie and Amy making retrieves.

Before we knew it was noon and time for lunch. Tom (who had hunted the fort years ago) had wanted to treat us to lunch at one the best little restaurants he remembered in Riley, Kansas called The Calico Inn. I had to tell him that the inn had closed almost ten years ago but that he was correct it had been a fine place to eat.

People in the area who were familiar with the inn in days past remember its unique operation. There were three or four dining size tables with about eight seats to each. It was first there first serve; if you were lucky enough to find a seat at any one of the tables you got to eat whatever the meal for that day was. There was always plenty of hot food and if a dish got empty it was replaced almost immediately. A typical meal might consist of fried chicken with mashed potatoes, gravy, black eyed peas, biscuits, corn on the cob and homemade pie. There was a stop light (a real traffic signal) outside the door and if

the light was green it meant that there was room at one of the tables but if it was red there was no seat available; come back another day.

In lieu of the Calico we three settled for a fare of bag lunches in the field with fruit, coffee or coke to wash it down. No time wasted we headed for soy beans. Our first stop in the beans produced no birds but just a little ways up the road our luck would change.

There are those rare moments when everything goes as prophesized and as we approached our second stop in the beans I told my guest that my past experience had always found the birds in this one covered corner. Sure enough the birds were exactly where I said they would be and it didn't take Mattie long to lay down on them. A beautiful covey (about 20 to 30 birds) flushed and it did all us good to see them though we would only take one bird; lose one bird and would find no singles.

Both Dave and Tom had told me that they had just about given up on quail because even though they loved hunting them in their respective areas the numbers had been on a steady decline for years and there was almost none to be found. I know how they felt and how good it must have been to see the numbers on post even though these numbers were down from last year.

We ended our day around 4:00 p.m. exhausted we were to catch sight of two more coveys but never get within shooting distance. These birds (obviously pressured) were runners and when they did get up flushed long distances.

As for myself the day ended too quickly and I can't remember a day that I enjoyed myself as much as I did with these two fine sportsmen; I hope that they will now list me as a friend and that we will be able to share many future hunts and correspondence.