



A Collector of Experiences

A POST-ADVENTURE REFLECTION
BY ANDREA BOGARD



Sitting beneath a Palmetto in South Florida, a shotgun across my lap, I listened to the world wake up for the day. I sifted through the sounds listening for the coveted “gobble,” an indicator I might be in the right place.

The chorus of hundreds of birds and distant cattle went to battle with the hum of insects and the sound of my own heartbeat. I watched the field before me brighten as the sun rose to the East.

In the quiet of my mind, I reflected on a conversation from the night before. I was sitting in a rocker in front of a fire pot with a glass of wine in hand soaking in the magic of Quail Creek Plantation. Across from me was my guide and host for the week, Fred Fanizzi. We were talking about big game hunting and the “trophy hunting” moniker, specifically.

In contrast to the smooth as honey Florida drawl, his next words struck me profoundly. “I am not a trophy hunter; I am a collector of experiences.”

I sat back in my rocking chair and absorbed the words, the fire and the message. I felt like I finally had the phraseology to describe a big part of what draws me to a life of pursuit. I’m not chasing an animal or a trophy, I’m chasing an experience. Let me tell you about the experience that is Quail Creek Plantation.

Earlier That Day

I gratefully pulled my rented Jeep up to a beautiful gated arch. The iconic quail in the center of the iron gate indicated I was in fact at

the right place. Having been up since three am to catch an early flight, I was quite excited to have arrived at my home for the next few days.

I parked and took in the lodge. Everything about it was both welcoming and elegant. The stone circle drive, the soaring rooflines and the impeccable landscaping all communicated a luxury experience you could both embrace and soak in.

The interior of the lodge was a warm palette of wood, beautiful taxidermy, hides and rich leathers. It was the kind of place you could feel at home in muddy camo or a cocktail dress and either would be absolutely fine.

On the subject of camo, I had a hunt to get

ready for. I was to hunt Osceola turkeys bright and early the following morning. Here are a few things to keep in mind as this adventure unfolds:

I have hunted turkeys with both a bow and shotgun.

I have never actually gotten a turkey.

I think turkeys are jerks. For critters with a pea-sized brain, they can be rather infuriating.

So, 4:45 the next morning, I got up showered, dressed, grabbed my shotgun and camera bag and off we went. Fred drove us through the soft Florida darkness to our spot. We were going to walk about a half a mile to our spot and make a Palmetto leaf blind once we got there.





Something important to note here - a great hunting guide is kind of like a good massage therapist. You are placing your well-being in that person's hands and that takes a lot of trust. Also, a good massage therapist knows when you just want to be quiet and internalize an experience versus carry on a conversation. That morning, I wanted to sit quietly and soak in everything with wide open senses. And, thanks to my great guide, that was exactly the experience I received.

Once we got settled in our blind, the layers of dawn rolled away to reveal a lush, green field laced with Spanish moss and beautiful live oaks. The parade of colors as the sky transitioned from night to day was like a living watercolor in front of me.

In true turkey form, we heard a few gobbles early on and then nothing. Long about 9:30 am Fred told me we were going to go on a walkabout around the field and see what we could find. With my Benelli slung over my shoulder, we headed out around the perimeter of the field.

With stealth in mind, we paused to glass and listen every 50-yards or so. Standing in the shade of a live oak, we glassed a cozy meadow in front of us. Ah hah! A hen's glossy head popped up above the softly waving grass. Hunkering down under the tree, we waited to see if she was alone or if there were any Toms with her.

We didn't have long to wait. With a rapid sequence of gobbles, a hasty reposition to face the right way, a deep breath and a prayer, I clicked the safety off on my Benelli M2 while I watched

two irritated gobblers round a Palmetto leaf.

With the eloquent advice of my guide playing in my head, I aimed where the "feather meets the

leather" on the larger one and squeezed. Poof! Feathers. Everywhere! My first turkey was officially on the ground!!!

As I walked up to him, I followed the trail of feathers to the big, glossy critter in the grass. I had my first turkey! After taking pictures, we walked back to the truck. Fred pulled out a couple chairs, put them under a tree, hung up my bird and handed me a Corona, complete with lime.

We sat beneath the live oaks, drank a beer and relived the hunt. As we slipped into comfortable silence, I reflected back on his philosophy. I am both a collector and pursuer of experiences, moments and memories. Thanks to Fred Fanizzi and Quail Creek Plantation, I have a truly magnificent experience to add to the collection. Thank you. It was truly an honor. ■

#deadbyfred

Check back for a full feature on Quail Creek Plantation and all this magnificent destination has to offer!

