



“How Many Sleeps, Mama?”

ANDREA BOGARD TALKS ABOUT TRIP PREPPING

As a mama who hunts, shoots and travels to keep cheerios on the table and meat in the freezer, I get this question a lot:

“How many sleeps ‘til you leave, Mama?”

“How many sleeps will you be gone?”

“What are you hunting?”

All good questions, and all have both specific answers and necessary prep. This time I am heading to Florida for an Osceola turkey and alligator hunt. I'll be writing multiple stories along the way about the destinations/lodges, the firearms used and the hunt itself. Like many things, the prep and planning are as important as the actual event.

WHAT AM I HUNTING WITH?

The prep for this trip is multi-faceted. First, I will be hunting turkeys so that means I will be taking a shotgun or a bow (it's not legal in most states to hunt turkeys with a rifle). I elected to bring a shotgun because I will be bow hunting turkeys here in Michigan later in the spring.

I decided to bring my Benelli M2 in 20 gauge with the timbered Gore pattern. I located the loads I wanted – Remington Nitro yellow three inch hull with 1 1/4 oz of copper plated 5s - and patterned the tightest choke I had. I was looking for a strong pattern in the neck/head area of my target at 30, 40 and 45 yards. I wasn't happy with the performance of that choke, so I bought a different one to try to improve my pattern density – the Carlson's Longbeard XR in 20 ga.

The new choke provided the performance I was looking for at the yardages I tested. Satisfied, I put the Benelli in my Pelican case and moved to the next discipline.

For my alligator hunt, I would be doing a spot and stalk style pursuit using a rifle. I decided to

take my Griffin & Howe Highlander in 6.5 Creedmoor. For an optic, I was using a Swarovski 3.5-18x50. The detachable carbon-fiber bi-pod would provide a variety of shooting position options, depending on encounter type and shot presentation.

Having never hunted alligators, I was full of questions. What kind of shot distance will we be looking for? What's the target area? Vitals? Head shot? My outfitter was more than happy to answer my questions and provided a ton of information to incorporate into my preparation. The most helpful piece for my current round of questions? “Make sure you can hit a quarter sized kill spot at 50 yards.”

Perfect. I love having concrete markers when preparing for a hunt. I started at the 100-yard range off my back patio. I checked my zero and evaluated target selection. I was shooting at a one-inch diameter dot which would be a little larger than a quarter. After a few shots, I decided to up the odds a bit. I got some pennies and taped them to my target. A couple shots later, I had two freshly shot pieces of brass, two pennies with .264 inch diameter holes in them and a strong dose of confidence I could ethically harvest an alligator.

Over the next several weeks, I would dry fire and live fire multiple times from a variety of shooting positions at varying distances. During a nationwide ammo shortage, dryfire practice is an invaluable practice and preparation tool.

GEAR

So, we know what we're hunting and what we're hunting it with. What's next? Gear. I have a hunting clothes buying problem. My husband reminds me of this frequently. I remind him that as problems go, it could be worse.

When prepping for a trip I look at weather, topography, hunting style, duration, peril encounter possibilities and pray for a flawed scale at the Delta check-in so I'm not whacked with an over-weight baggage charge.



Eleanor - My GH Highlander rifle



Dryfire is invaluable





- I'll be hunting in warm weather (75-85 degrees and sunny)
- Relatively flat ground
- Spot/stalk as well as some blind sits
- Six days on the ground
- Snakes

For gear, we're going with light weight, quick dry, breathable, sun-protective, merino-wool focused pieces as well as a rain-coat and snake boots. There are some great brands out there that meet these parameters in women's hunting gear. Sitka gear and Prois both offer some great options!

Let's go a layer deeper: I always travel with a variety of sports bras for two reasons. Number one, you never know when you're going to have to take off at a dead run down a concourse to make a plane. Number two, a recoil induced imprint on your shoulder from bra adjustment hardware is never comfortable. Also, watch your fabrics in your undergarments while hunting. Quick dry (not 100% cotton), breathable fabrics are key. I like being able to handwash pieces in the field if I miscalculate my packing needs.

PACKING

Packing is both an artform and an engineering class with a little prayer and pixie dust mixed in. I sent my 13-year-old son to Alaska last year on a fishing trip and I'll never forget the look on his face when I packed his veritable mountain of stuff into his suitcase with room to spare. I'm

treasuring that look of admiration as we head into the teenage years...

To pack for a hunting trip, priorities must be established. I know I am taking two long guns, ammo for both, binos, a range finder and a bi-pod in addition to clothing, camera equipment, a laptop and hunting-friendly toiletries.

I have multiple options for cases, but elected to go with a long, thinner Pelican case that will accommodate both long guns and the required ammo. Check state/airline/TSA regulations for specifics on packing these items.

I've got my clothes laid out, my guns safely packed and my camera gear prepped for travel. Toiletries when you hunt are kind of a different beast. You want to be efficient, practical and preferably as scent free as possible. Select items that will protect your skin and hair and not smell like you just bought out a Bath and Body Works store.

Now we put it all together. I'm a list person, so here we go:

- Guns
- Ammo
- Binos
- Rangefinder
- Bi-pod
- Camera gear/batteries
- Chargers/Adapters (adapters are really important if you are traveling internationally, so find out what the format is at your destination).
- Laptop
- Harddrives
- Tags/Licenses
- Clothes
- Boots
- Toiletries
- Cash

So tonight when I hear the question, "How many sleeps, Mama?" my answer is "Two, Baby." I will snuggle him up in my lap, smell the days dirt in his blond buzz cut and kiss his squishy cheeks. I will know that while I am prepping for a hunting trip, I am teaching him what it means to chase a dream. I am showing him what it means to work for something. At the end of the day, I'm not showing him how to prepare for a trip. I'm showing him how to make a dream a reality. ■



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