

Lightsey's Family Ranch

The Hunt For Fun

BY
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Why do you hunt? For some it's a rather masochistic pursuit revolving around training masks, gym reps and "sheep shape" work outs. For others it's a firepit and stories from decades before, with no new harvests on the horizon. Here at Lightsey's Family Ranch in Venus, Florida, it's about the fun. Let's go for a visit!

Welcome to Lightsey's! I had a chance to check it out in April. I was down in Florida on a multi-species pursuit. I had harvested a beautiful Osceola turkey earlier in the week and was now heading to Lightsey's Family Ranch for a gator hunt and quail hunting walk along.

My burgundy rental Jeep was a vague shade of brown after the fifth GPS-inspired turn heading toward Lightsey's. There is a special place in my heart for dirt roads. They force me to slow down, absorb, breathe and take in my world. I promised myself I would raise my boys on a dirt road. My black truck reminds me every day I am living my dream...

I slowed down and pulled in. The front of the lodge sprawled in front of me – comfortable, cohesive and welcoming. I parked and headed toward the main door. The hot (by my Northern Michigan standards) mid-morning sun beat down on my hat as I crossed the gravel lot to the natural wooden plank door.



I opened the door and was immediately greeted by a smiling face. “Welcome to Lightsey’s! You must be Andrea!” The voice belonged to a woman who looked me square in the face. I’m five feet tall so it’s rare I encounter someone on eye level. I later learned her name was Maureen.

I smiled back and responded in the affirmative. “I’ve got your room ready to go and Blake is waiting for you outside,” she said with a smile.

Marvelous. Blake was to be my guide for my alligator hunt (check out the story “Shelah” in this issue to hear about that!). With a smile on my face and a promise of short-ribs for lunch, I headed out the door.

Camera gear in hand, gun in the truck and the dream of short-ribs and cornbread later on, I headed out to chase a gator. It was a great hunt that involved multiple locations, tons of questions, “gator”ade, belly crawls, close encounters and a



perfectly beautiful alligator!

The best part about the hunt after my glorious nearly 10-foot gator? My awesome guide, Blake. He was a great blend of fun and focus. He answered my questions and also listened to what I wanted to get out of the hunt. Priceless feature set in a guide...

Well, my gator was on the ground. Being a photographer, an artist, a writer and an overall detail-focused person, I wanted to take a LOT of pictures. Many I could get myself, but I needed a second person to get the rest. My guide did an INCREDIBLE job getting the imagery I needed and wanted to tell the story of this awesome experience.



That evening after a fabulous dinner in the comfortable lodge, I headed out for a tour of the Preserve. There were massive gators, beautiful white tails, colorful pheasants, mature stags and an adorable tortoise that cooperated beautifully with my persistent desire for photos.





Once back at the lodge, I explored the sprawling patio and comfortable porch. There were paths leading away from the lodge toward the compact 5-stand a little ways away. The magical Edison bulb lights created a runway of sorts into the soft Florida twilight. Talk about an amazing evening stroll after a successful hunt! It really doesn't get more relaxing than that...

A restful night was had in the king-sized bed in my functional, comfortable and homey lodge room. The morning dawned briefly crisp with a promise of heat and humidity to come.

That morning I was going to tag along on a quail hunt. Quail hunting is a truly iconic hunting

experience. If you have never tried it, I highly recommend! Bird hunting, and quail hunting in particular, is a collision of cultural traditions, strong dog work and shooting prowess.

Lightsey's Family Ranch has brought this rich tradition to Venus, Florida. Let's explore, shall we?

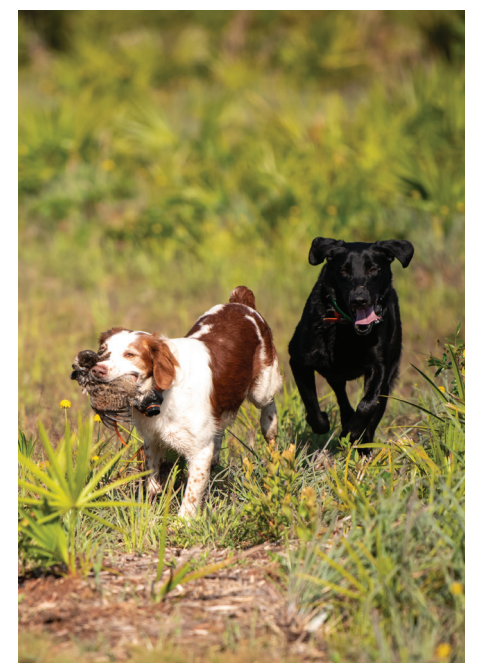
I walked out of my cozy lodge room. My blaze orange shirt and black camera pack both reflect and absorb the beautiful Florida sunrise. I approached a retro-fitted, high-rise vehicle with at least four excited dogs in it.

Tomas, a quail guide from Argentina, hopped down and extended a hand. His smile and accent took me back to a dove hunt in South America. There was a good morning ahead...



We got to the field. The Palmettos waved lazily under their dewey morning weight. The dogs were collared and aired out. Tomas gave each a morning love before being released to the field.

Quail hunting is a unique process. There is a pointer, a flusher, a guide and a hunter. It is a perfectly choreographed dance of biology, wind direction, scent conditions, handler/dog relationship and hunter ability. All of these components must work together for the moving target of "success" to be achieved.



Is success a limit in the bag? Is it time in the field? Is it magnificent dog work? Is it camaraderie along the way? Or, is it just the beauty of another moment in this crazy journey of life?

However you define "success" is up to you. Now, if you're looking for fun, that's also up to you. At Lightsey's Family Ranch you can enjoy fun, food and fellowship while chasing both game and an experience.

Contact them today to find out more about how Lightsey's Family Ranch can help you hunt for fun on your next adventure! ■