



Can We Go Again?

SHE SAID SHE wanted to go turkey hunting.

It's hard to separate truth from fantasy in an 11-year-old. Did she really want to get up in five hours, step into darkness on a cold morning, and wish someone could coax a wild animal to walk to her?

She did not relent.

The camouflage was borrowed from mom, dad and cousins. Overalls were rolled up almost half their length. Both hands could have fit into one glove. The shoes were built more for barns than brambles.

There are gives when an 11-year-old is shaken awake after just five hours of sleep. There will be a nap in the truck. Her belly will hurt. And when she wakes up, there will be much more excitement and dialogue than from weary old men who still have sleep in their eyes.

The first leg of the hunt doesn't seem very technical. You go into the woods, find a spot, then pause and call. A crow call can



MITCH HOWARD PHOTO

sometimes locate a gobbler. The yelps and purrs of a hen are the other tricks in the arsenal. After finding a willing contestant not too far away, the pursuit begins.

Down a gravel road and then dropping

Eleven-year-old Maggie Howard sounds a crow call to locate a gobbler during her first turkey hunt.

into the woods. The responses grow closer. Dipping into a valley and halfway up another ridge, the hunters stop to set up a small blind in a thicket of brush and fallen timber.

The caller, her uncle Mark, sets up against a tree 25 yards from the blind. As often happens, the turkey gets shy as it gets closer. Other than the man-made calls, there is only silence. At this point it is more than she can take. The adrenaline has ebbed and the young hunter falls asleep on the cold leaves.

She did not startle when told the turkey was getting within range. The barrel edged out of the front of the blind as the gobbler strode confidently through the timber about 25 yards away. There was no time to put in earplugs. In less than a minute the safety was pressed and a shot fired.

This one got away.

We talked about what may have gone wrong. She had not been told to aim at the head and neck; she had aimed instead at the chest.

We tried to get another turkey to answer, but it seemed they already had dates for the dance. She turned and led us straight out of the woods. We dropped down into the valley, crossed the stream and topped the hill. Her uncle Mark called her a bloodhound.

Back in the truck, it was time to relive the hunt before sleep again. And I heard the words I wanted to hear: "Can we go again, Dad?" ■

Author Mitch Howard is a former sports editor and current part-time sports writer in London.

WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

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