

South Texas Provides Unique Archery Challenge

By Nick Pinizzotto
Appalachian Whitetails Owner



It was the end of another long day at work and I was anxiously working my way toward the parking garage when my hip tingled with the vibration of my cell phone. Not recognizing the number, I was a little reluctant to answer, but as usual, the curiosity got the best of me.



Nick Pinizzotto

Prickly Pear Cactus is one of many plant species that will have you watch where you're walking.

The southern accent of the woman on the other line had me immediately thinking telemarketer, that is until she introduced herself as Nancy from First Point Bowhunting located in Maverick County, Texas. Then, it all came back to me. My booth at an archery show I attended earlier in the year was adjacent to theirs, and I mentioned at the time I would be interested in bowhunting their ranch should they have any cancellations. As usual, they were booked for the season, and to be honest, I never expected to hear back from them.

Now I was faced with a decision. They had a three-day hunt available, and I had the same three days open on my calendar. This was too much of a coincidence for me not to recognize, so I headed straight for my computer to check out plane ticket prices. Before I knew it, I was flying to San Antonio, from where I would drive an additional two hours into south Texas, just 30 miles from the Mexico border, to the ranch.

Before this hunt, all I knew about hunting in south Texas was it was primarily ground hunting, and it was common to use naturally built blinds. How tough could it be, right?

Shortly after arriving at camp I was paired up with my pasture mate, who I would share approximately 500 acres with. As luck would have it, Dale Land was a Texas native and had plenty of experience hunting at First Point Bowhunting.

After a few minutes of socializing, Dale asked me two questions I wasn't used to hearing just prior to a bowhunt. The two questions were, do you have any corn or a shovel? The startled look on my face must have been enough for him to realize that I had no clue what I was in for. If the ranch manger Mike Palmer saying, "the corn truck runs between 2 p.m. and 4 p.m." didn't clue me in, the conversation with Dale certainly did.



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A view from inside a newly constructed ground blind.



Nick Pinizzotto and hunting partner Dale Land of Texas.

After a quick lesson on building a blind, including digging out the bottom so you can sit below brush level, I figured I knew all I needed to know about outsmarting a wily Texas whitetail buck.

For the first night, I hunted from an existing blind that was built a couple of weeks or so before I had arrived. Peering through the small openings in the front, I could barely make out the dirt road 25 yards in front of me. Although I wasn't too keen on the idea of hunting over a road, the locals convinced me that I didn't stand a chance if I didn't.

My watch read 3:15 p.m. when the "corn truck" zoomed by spouting small amounts of corn onto the roadway. I chuckled to myself as I remembered Dale saying, "when that truck comes by, get ready because a hot doe may entice a big buck out of the brush as she feeds along the road."

As if the corn truck had dropped the deer off in front of me, there they were looking right at me from the road. I thought I was hidden well enough, but it was obvious that these deer knew the blind was there, and that I was in it. A mature doe and decent eight-point took about ten seconds to decide they better get out of harm's way. That was the first of many times I was

spotted in my blind by deer well before I spotted them.

I spent the better part of the next day walking around scouting the pasture, and trying to locate the perfect spot to build a good blind. During my travels, I spotted a dandy ten-point that I estimated to be in the 140 inch to 150 inch class. That was enough to keep me motivated because my time sitting in the blinds hadn't been very productive.

Talking with the guys at camp, it seemed that the action overall wasn't very good. The rut was on, but it wasn't at its peak, with just a few reports of hot does being chased.

On a three-day hunt, the end comes quickly and, before you know it, you're down to the last day.

I spent the better part of my second afternoon building a blind that even the locals could be proud of. I found an area that showed the signs of a good buck, and decided I would finish up my hunt in that location.

During my first evening in the blind, I had several does walk by without detecting my presence. If nothing else, I at least knew that I did a good job of constructing the blind. Despite not seeing any bucks, I felt good about the next morning, which would be my last on the ranch.

The desert temperature dropped to the low 30s, which made me feel right at home. After scraping the frost from the gear I left out overnight, I anxiously made my way to the blind.

Just before getting into position, I squirted an ample amount of Apparition™ Dead Red territorial scent along the road about 20 yards from my blind. If there was a big buck in the area, he would surely come along to see who was invading his territory.

Not long after daylight, just as the coyotes ended their morning howling session, I could hear the sound of hooves on the gravel road ahead of me. With only two small holes to peer through, it was

killing me to not be able to see fully the big bodied deer that was investigating the scent I put out earlier. I could see a large body behind the brush, but I couldn't tell if this was the big buck I traveled there for.

Suddenly I came to the realization that although I couldn't tell if the deer in front of me was a shooter, I'd better get into position as I had only a small window of shooting opportunity, and it may happen fast.

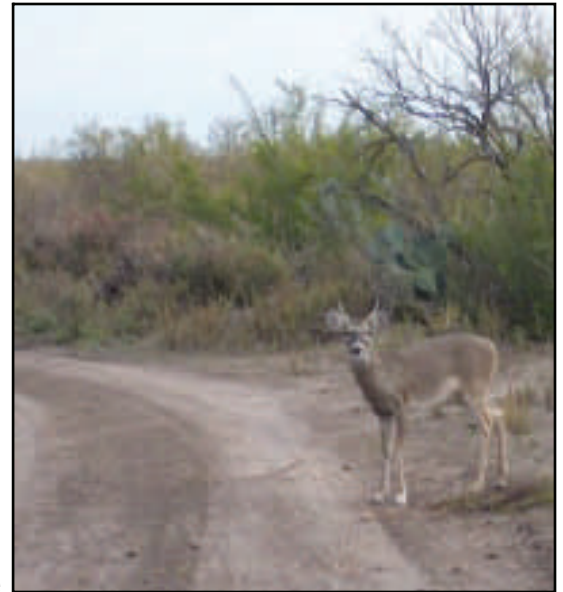
Unfortunately for me, it was a cold and quiet morning, with every little sound being magnified. As I slowly removed my hand from my pocket to attach my release, the slight sound of my hand brushing my jacket material caused the deer to raise his head.

I couldn't believe my eyes as the massive buck with a stunningly dark rack lifted his head to investigate the noise. After about 20 seconds, the giant buck turned and retreated in the direction he came from. Under most circumstances, I would have been extremely disappointed, but the fact that I was able to get that close to such a magnificent animal was a thrill.

I wouldn't fill my tag on this trip, but the experience of hunting whitetails in a totally foreign environment, using tactics that I was completely unfamiliar with, was worth the time and money invested.

I returned to camp and said my goodbyes to the new friends I made while on the trip. All but three of the 20 hunters in camp were native Texans. I was surprised to learn that leasing time on ranches was about the only way for them to get access to good hunting property.

A three-day hunt was a small window of time to learn the ins and outs of hunting south Texas whitetails, but I learned enough over that time to be better prepared for the next trip, which I hope to have the opportunity to take in the future.



Nick Pinizzotto

Pasture roads provide the best opportunity for a shot as deer emerge from the brush to feed.

Planning a South Texas Hunt?

What You Will Need

- ◆ high quality blind
- ◆ stool or chair
- ◆ shovel
- ◆ corn (available everywhere in Texas)
- ◆ gloves for brushing
- ◆ scent eliminator (it's much warmer there)
- ◆ snake-proof boots (seasonal)

Tips for Success

- ◆ Practice shooting from a seated position. It is unlikely you will be able to stand up in your blind to get a shot.
- ◆ Don't move! It's amazing how adept these deer are at locating you in your blind.
- ◆ Practice ground hunting at home. If you're used to always hunting from a stand, blind hunting is a totally different ball game.
- ◆ Contact your outfitter ahead of time to get clarification on all of their rules. For instance, there is a \$500 fine for shooting an immature buck at First Point Bowhunting.
- ◆ The rut in south Texas begins in early December. Use similar calling and scent tactics as you would in other areas of the country.
- ◆ If you are flying, be sure your bow is safely secured in a hard case. It is counted as one luggage item by the airlines.
- ◆ Be on the lookout for hogs, coyotes, cattle, and a variety of other animals that inhabit this area. You never know what you're going to see.

Where I Hunted

First Point Bowhunting
Maverick County, Texas
Mike and Nancy Palmer
Call 830.988.2019

Visit their website:

www.firstpointbowhunting.com