



# *The Last Day*

by Donovan Watson

I signed up for a hog hunt at the Michigan Longbow Association's Winter Awards Banquet. Rick Butler, Doug Gilmore, Andrew Zwerk, Gary Swinton, Brad Boettcher, George Marlatt, and Thom Jorgenson were already committed to the trip. I had always wanted to hunt hogs and figured the glass backed longbow I had recently built might be the perfect medicine for a SC pig. Andrew Harper runs the "Wild Things" preserve, a 4000 acre ranch in Estill, SC. The scenic ranch runs for several miles along the Savannah River. There are no fences at "Wild Things" and hogs have been running wild there since the early explorers set them loose. There is also a lot of flint found on the property, a rarity in that area, making it a very important place for Indian tribes long ago.

After a long drive from Michigan, I set up for an evening hunt and brought out a light with a red lens to see how it would work if a hog were to come in after dark. Unfortunately the only thing I saw was a raccoon and the red lens did not seem to bother him, so I packed it in early thinking that "tomorrow is another day".

The next morning after coffee and breakfast, the group discussed where they were going to go to find some hogs for a spot and stalk style hunt. I decided to go back to where I had gone the day before as I had seen some good sign of hog action. Not to mention I had spread some corn

mixed with horse feed to hopefully draw the action back.

I did some more scouting and found another spot in the palm meadows with a decent amount of rooting going on so I marked the area with a GPS. A break for a bottle of water and a couple of oranges, then I was off again to do more scouting. I worked my way back to the truck to get some lunch and see how everyone else had done.

Doug had seen hogs and said he got to put a stalk on several of them. He did well for about 20 minutes before getting busted. After lunch the temperatures rose to the upper 80s, which is just too hot for me. Some of the guys in camp took a nap before the evening hunt. A couple had their bicycles with them and went out for a ride looking for hogs. I stayed up and practiced shooting for a bit then relaxed on the couch until evening.

I decided to go back to the same place as the night before since my light was still set up for an evening hunt. The night started out pretty well with a turkey coming in then not much later a couple of deer showed. I was not sure it was a good idea to keep the deer around, so I chased them off. I thought if a hog were to come in, and the deer saw me move, the deer would spook the hog. About an hour later the deer were back, they really liked what was under the feeder. They brought along a possum so I shined the light on all of them and was happy



that the red light did not seem to bother either the deer or the opossum. I was confident that I was in good shape to harvest a hog should one come in after dark.

Another night with no piggies coming by, so on the way back to the truck I walked past another feeder and stopped to check it out. Like the stand I had been in, this one had not been hit either. I started to think that the hogs were moving either really late at night or very early in the morning. I thought that maybe I would skip breakfast and just head out early to the stand. That was the plan for the next morning.

It was the third day of the hunt and I had yet to see a hog, but walking out to the stand I passed the feeder and notice that there had been pig activity! There were tracks every where! One of the legs had even been kicked out on the feeder. So I made my way to the stand and sat for 2 hours but again saw nothing. I left the stand to scout and hope for a stalk. I checked out a couple of spots I had found earlier in the week but again, had no luck. On the way back to the truck I began to think about what I needed to do to be ready for an evening hunt. If I go back to the same stand there was not much to do, but hope.

When I returned to camp I checked with Andrew concerning a portable stand that I could hang in a different location. Andrew agreed to let me borrow the stand so after a nice long rest I headed out just before dark. The stand was only set 2 feet off the ground but the lights were



set and everything was ready to go by 8pm. Now there was nothing to do but wait.

As the sun set the woods and swamp came alive. All the different sounds made a music that at times was deafening. Time flew by with me turning my head left and right trying to figure out what was moving around me in the dark. Once I saw car lights drive by, my first thought was that Thom or Gary had shot a hog. At least somebody was seeing something, but it sure wasn't me. I had not seen anything and was starting to get tired. Every time I heard a noise I was ready to jump out of the low hung stand. I nocked my arrow twice during the night, with the only sighting being a possum. At 2:00 am I decided to pack it in.

I really wanted to see a hog, and was excited when I found out that Thom had hit one, but hadn't been able to find it. After breakfast I volunteered to go and help locate the animal. There was not much blood and a lot of tracks to choose from. We pulled Thom's stand and reset it for Gary for the last night of the hunt. For my last try I moved to a spot they called the Blue Lake stand. There was lots of sign and I hoped that this stand would produce.

I was in the stand by 5pm and a little after 6, I saw my first hog! This really got me pumped! As a matter of fact, it made my week! I told myself that whatever happened now, didn't matter because I had seen a hog. As I watched the sow come into the field a piglet soon followed. Immediately I knew she was not a shooter. She ended up going across the road and out of sight soon after.

At dark I turned on the light. The wind died down and the woods began to come alive. I had just started to light my Therna-cell, when a hog appeared. I could not yet see it in the dark, but I sure could hear it. The sounds indicated that it had found the corn mix I had put out and was sucking it up nonstop. Before long I spotted the hog through the pines and I started thinking that I should have trimmed between a couple more trees, but it was too late now. The pig fed closer but turned in the direction of the feeder. If it got to the feeder the shot would be too far for my longbow. I had an arrow nocked and was at full draw when the feather touched my nose I released. I didn't even remember letting loose of the string, but I can say

that the shot felt good. The hog let out a squeal then promptly ran across the water hole. I heard 2 more loud grunts before the hog took off in the direction of the road.

At the sound of branches breaking, I hoped that the hog was down. I mentally marked the tree where I had last seen the animal, and pulled out my phone to line up the compass. It was ENE and 52 degrees. I knew that after I got down from the stand all the trees would look the same. It had been about 25 minutes when I got down from the stand and headed for the truck. I flashed my headlamp at a passing vehicle and before long, Andrew, Brad, Doug and the camp hand Charlie were all there to help in the search.

I again pulled my phone and pointed the compass in the direction the hog had gone. In just minutes we were within 20 ft of where it had gone into the woods. It was at this spot that we found my arrow. About ten more yards we could see the brush pile the hog had gone through. The bad part there was no blood. We made it to the road with no sign. I found some fresh tracks through the mud and then about 15 yards further, we found blood. That was about the time Charlie said he heard something takeoff, he thought it was an Armadillo, but I didn't think so. We decided to pull out and get some dinner. We decided to postpone the recovery until morning.

We awoke bright and early the next morning, to the last day of the hunt. Thom and George said they would help with the track we had abandoned the night before. After searching for over 2 hours with no sign of the pig, we checked the road side then down a logging trail. Suddenly I heard large branches breaking that were just too big for an escaping squirrel. About this time rain began to fall so I headed for the truck and suggested to Thom and George that they take down their stands before the roads get wet. I was determined going to check out the sound I heard in down the logging road.

As I approached the spot I heard branches breaking



again so I began to walk toward the sound. I saw something black moving between the trees and was certain it was a hog. At that moment however, I was unsure if the hog was the one I had shot the day before or another animal that I had simply happened upon. Working my way to within 50 yards, I waited anxiously for the pig to turn so I that I could get a good look at it's right side. The hog finally changed positions but there was no blood that I could see. I did notice that the hog was not putting any weight on it's right rear leg.

Quietly I stalked to within 18 yards as the hog entered an open field. I nocked an arrow as the adrenalin began to flow. I hit my anchor, release the string and send the arrow on it's way. Again the shot looked a bit far back but the hog quickly lay down. I backed away and sat on the side of the road, feeling exhausted but at the same time happy. I made my way back to the truck and honked the horn for help. Thom responded to my signal and together we approached the downed hog. It took two more arrows to seal the deal that included a stare down and growls that would make any bowhunter rethink his choice of game.

Donavan and his wife, Audrey, reside in Reading, Michigan with their son, Sam. Donovan enjoys numerous aspects of archery including building bows and designing custom leather arm guards.