

They all laughed — including the turkey

BY JOHN N. FELSHER

Before hunting leases became popular — and very expensive — paper and timber companies frequently allowed people to hunt vast tracts of their forests for free, as long as we didn't cut down any trees.

My older brother bought a used 1964 Ford Falcon as his first car. Built like a Sherman tank, it could go anywhere, making it an excellent hunting vehicle. Of course, being the only vehicle available to us at the time also made it an excellent hunting vehicle. We frequently took that old Falcon to those timberland tracts, cruising old logging roads looking for game and new hunting spots.

Just about every piece of metal and joint in that old car squeaked. When we rumbled over those rough roads, Ol' Squeaky started singing, even over the slightest bump in roads, commonly dubbed "washboards," alerting anything in the woods for miles. However, it apparently emitted a certain squeak that turkeys liked, or at least aroused

their curiosity. Whenever we drove the Falcon through the woods, turkeys would come running up to the edge of the road to see what in the world was coming.

Growing up hunting ducks and small game, we didn't know much about hunting wild turkeys, a rather uncommon and mysterious game bird to us back then. When Ol' Squeaky rattled up a turkey, the only thing we could think to do to bag that bird was stop, grab our shotguns and start running after it as the very startled bird rapidly disappeared into the forests.

Of course, that never worked. However, I did almost get a shot at one gobbler one day. Rather than running, this smart gobbler remembered he had broad wings and could fly. He didn't need to run through the briars, brambles and underbrush like we did. He could fly over that stuff and proceeded to do just that. After flying a short distance, the fat gobbler landed on a branch near the top of a tree just out of the effective range of my shotgun, but well within

my view.

Now, I've got him, I thought to myself, racing as fast as I could to cut the distance. I'm about to bag my first turkey. I'll be a hero next Thanksgiving and maybe my parents will let me sit at the big boy table instead of by myself at the kids' table, which was not only embarrassing, but depressing since I was the last of the kids.

Knowing that I'd never see him again, I needed to take this, my only chance. I kept my eyes keenly focused on that bird as I ran to get into shotgun range before he flew off and disappeared forever. That plan worked amazingly well and I made good progress — at least at first.

Just about the time I reasoned that I cut the distance sufficiently to chance a shot at extreme range, I made a rather abrupt and loud stop. With my eyes peeled so hard on that bird, I didn't notice the large thicket comprised primarily of brambles and thorny vines coming at me at high speed, relatively speaking for one of the slowest runners in

school. I also didn't notice that the little game trail that I was following, probably made by a rabbit since deer were also scarce in those days, disappeared under that pile of bristling, razor-sharp spikes. (Okay, maybe that's a slight exaggeration.)

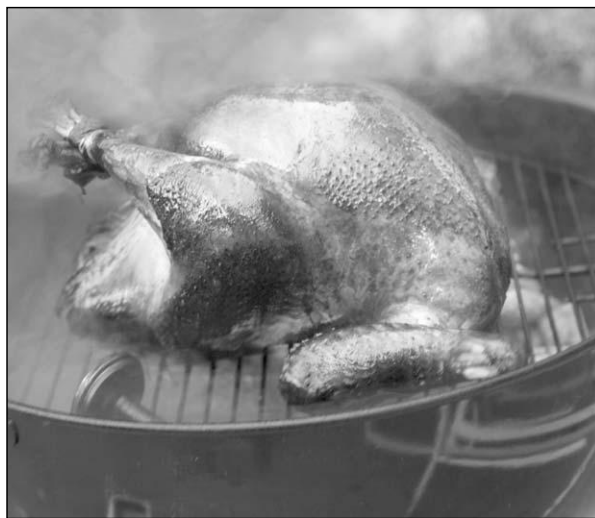
Although I was a small child at that time, I was still much bigger than any rabbit. After making my sudden halt, I struggled to extricate myself from the thorny situation without losing more than a quart or two of blood, which took considerably more time than it did to run this far.

I don't know what happened to the gobbler when I made my unexpected rapid deceleration, but I seem to remember the haunting notes that distinctly sounded like laughter echoing through the treetops where the bird had sat just seconds before. I sense a setup. Of course, it might have been the rabbit making that noise too, or my brother who I know was laughing from the road. I wouldn't trust any of them not to tell anyone.

Recipe: Smoked turkey

Ingredients

1 Whole wild turkey
Salt and pepper to taste
1 12-inch section of
cheese cloth
1/4 cup melted butter
1/4 cup bourbon whiskey



First, fill the charcoal pan in the smoker and light the coals. Season outside of turkey with salt and pepper to taste. Place turkey on smoker rack with the breast up. Fold the cheese cloth into a square and lay it on top of the breast area of the bird. Mix the butter (melted) and the bourbon and saturate the cheese cloth with the mixture. Once the coals have fully ignited (they should all be white), add a large chunk of green hickory to the coals or several smaller pieces. Dry hickory can be soaked in water and used if green wood is unavailable. Fill the water pan in the smoker with hot water and place the lid on the smoker. Allow the turkey to smoke overnight or all day--how long depends on your smoker. Note: the alcohol in the bourbon will evaporate during the cooking process--the turkey is guaranteed to be non-alcoholic.

Submitted by Corky Pugh, Director, Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division (retired)

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