



Caleb's Christmas Predator Hunt

**By Steven Bridges
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One of the biggest changes I have seen in the nature of deer hunting in Mills County over the last twenty years is the increase of adults taking kids hunting. This is great for the continuation of the rural hunting tradition that we hold dear in Mills County. And it is also a great way for parents and grandparents to spend blocks of uninterrupted quality time with their little ones.

Local Grandfather Robb "Poppi" Hemsath called me with a dilemma last week. All his grandkids deemed old enough to hunt had bagged a deer this fall. That is, all but the youngest of the hunters... Caleb.

Robb had taken Caleb out deer hunting several times. But as anyone who takes kids hunting knows, it can be difficult to close the deal when a young kid is involved. Robb admits that maybe Caleb, five, is a little young for deer hunting.

"He shoots great at targets from a bench," said Robb. "I told him if he could hit the bull's eye of a target at 100 yards, I'd take him deer hunting. Caleb did it the first try. But aiming a rifle at a live, moving deer from a blind is another thing altogether."

Robb said the duo had been in their blind with deer close, only to have Caleb say, "Poppi... I can't find the deer in my scope!" The excitement combined with all the variables of free range deer hunting turned out to be a little too much for young Caleb... and Robb.

During one of these hunts, Robb and Caleb saw a gray fox from their stand. Of course, the fox was running back and forth as foxes do. "There was no way Caleb could get the rifle on it," said Robb.

Caleb got really excited about the fox, more so than even deer hunting. In short, Caleb got INTO predators. He asked a bunch of questions about predators. So Poppi read all about predators to Caleb. They watched predator calling shows nearly every night. Caleb forgot about

deer hunting and now wanted to shoot a predator and get it mounted for his Christmas present.

Robb had another dilemma. There is no way Caleb could go out at night (way past his bedtime by the way) and have any chance of holding his rifle on a predator coming to a distress call.

In his day job, Robb is the CEO of Mills County State Bank. Strategic planning is one of his main duties. He has years of experience problem solving and planning for contingencies. And true to form, Robb had an idea for an easier way for Caleb to harvest a predator. His plan involved a local trapper... me.

Robb texted soon after and asked if I had a way for Caleb to shoot a predator on my trap line in a way that would make Caleb feel like he bagged it himself.

I knew just how to make that happen.

I have been taking my two kids, children from my extended family, and their friends trapping for several years now. They all like the fact that, unlike deer hunting, they don't have to be still and quiet. Plus, they like to snack and sit in the front seat of my truck when we are checking my traps inside the ranch.

In addition to the relaxed atmosphere of the trapping "hunt," there is no chance of missing an animal. Or more importantly... they can miss all they want. The animal will still be there for the next shot. "Fair Chase" is not much of a concern for kids just starting out. Success is more important in the early stages of hunting.

Over time, I have developed a little system of helping the kids feel like a part of the process. I played this out with Caleb and Robb. I told Caleb and Robb as they got in my truck, "Whoever sees the animal in the trap first gets to claim it and shoot it."

Caleb perked right up and started pointing out every cactus, rock and stump in the area. At least I had his attention.

As I pulled up into the field where I knew



Caleb Hemsath and his first fox.

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