

Raccoon Hunting in Clinton County

Mike Fuller
FLK 276 Evans
11/26/14

Introduction

A couple weeks ago I had the opportunity to participate in a raccoon hunt in Clinton County with one of my friends I met during my college endeavors. With my initial assumption of raccoon hunting being some country boy activity I learned that there's a lot more to it than that. As I had my own journey in the effort to join a group of people I had never met to do something I had never done.

While the popularity of 'coon hunting' has decreased over the past decades it is still a past time in which many hunters participate in every year. On this study I uncovered the history of coon hunting, how it is performed in Clinton County, other important information, and was able to make some great new friends while doing so. I did a majority of this through participant observation and interaction during an actual hunt. Also through many conversations with the experienced coon hunters I met on this trip I was able to uncover more information on the topic. In this paper I will underline the background of coon hunting and explain the experience I had, as I was able to assimilate into this group of guys that turned out to be much more than just some hunters.

Background

While the exact origin of raccoon hunting is unknown, it dates all the way back to some of the earliest Native American's. The start of the 20th century is when coon hunting really kicked off as a recreational and organized sport. Unlike hunting any other kind of game, the raccoon hunter operates at night. The hunting of a raccoon consists of training certain breeds of dogs to trail, hunt, and tree raccoons. 'Treeing' a raccoon is when a hound has chased the coon up into a tree for safety, the hound then gives off a specific bark to signal the hunters that they have treed a coon and to scare the coon to stay in the tree.

The dogs are trained so follow the specific scent and give off certain signals depending on the status of the hound. The hunters either use electronic tracking collars or the sound of the dog to follow it to its location. Once the hunters arrive at the tree they use their headlight and shine it up into the tree to search for the reflection off the eyes of the raccoon. Once the raccoon is spotted in the tree they then typically use a .22 caliber rifle to shoot the raccoon out of the tree, letting it fall to the dogs viciously waiting below. The reward from killing these raccoons is the use of the pelt and the meat it provides. In some places raccoon meat can be considered a delicacy and can be made into a delicious meal. The selling prices of the raccoon fur used to be high until the popularity of the sport picked up and the selling price dropped overtime. While the popularity of the sport has recently decreased it is still a past time that is enjoyed by many internationally.

Equipment

The equipment of the modern day raccoon hunter is much more complex than it was in the past. Some of the first raccoon hunters had only a .22 caliber rifle with iron sights and a simple headlight. Present day raccoon hunters have revolutionized the sport with .22 rifles that are equipped with high power scopes that are much more accurate and powerful compared to previously used models.

Also they use modified head lights that are brighter, last longer, and are rechargeable. The headlights they use can have different color covers on them to help see the raccoon better. Whatever color the hunter uses is up to their own preference. All raccoon hunters should wear heavy duty water proof boots as you may have to travel across all different types of terrain in the search of where your dogs treed the raccoon.

Past hunters had to track their dogs by the sound of their bark and had the chance of losing them during the hunt. Modern hunters have the use of electronic tracking collars that can be put on their dogs that not only gives the location of the dog but with the use of new technology can see the position of the dog and whether they have treed a coon or not. With the use of modern day equipment the art of raccoon hunting has become more convenient and efficient for maximum effectiveness while on the hunt.

Coonhounds

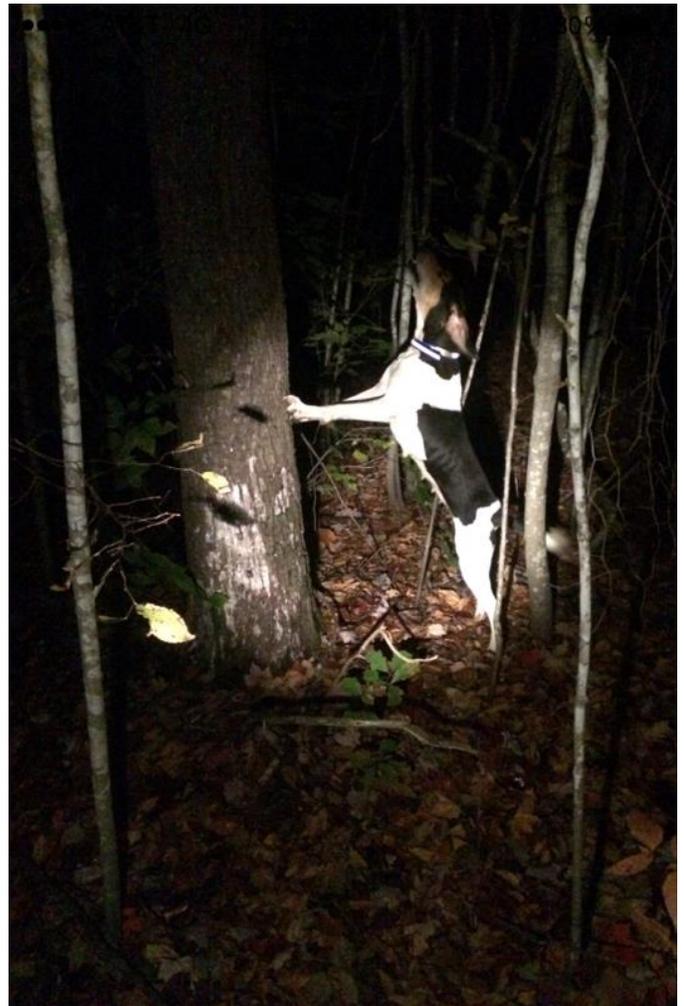
A raccoon hunter has many choices of breeds to choose from to assemble their pack of hounds that will become the backbone of their future hunts. In the hunt I participated in we used 4 of the Treeing Walker Coonhounds. Some of the other species that are commonly used are the Blue tick, Redbone, Plott, and the American English coonhound.

While there is many other species that will suffice the ones listed are the most popular. No matter which breed the hunter uses all of these dogs are excellent for hunting and tracking the scent of raccoons. The dog you choose needs to have many qualities such as endurance, speed, the ability to follow scents, strength, and even traits such as determination and courage. All of these are important in choosing the perfect coonhound for a hunt.

For a beginner it is incredibly challenging to train a coonhound from scratch so it is recommended to buy one that is

previously trained and ready to go. From here you

can buy puppies from litters and can match them up with older dogs and they will learn from observation (Rakow, 1997). For those that do choose to train their own dogs they use methods such as artificial scents and use fake raccoons.



One of the Walker Coonhounds we

First Glance

On November 15th, 2014 I was in the car with my friend Nate Stearns, who I met at school, on our way to Clinton County, Kentucky to meet up with his cousin Donovan Edwards. It was about a 2-hour drive out to Clinton County from Bowling Green and we finally arrived around 5p.m. Upon first arriving I noticed their land was about 5 acres with multiple farmhouses and it was all surrounded by forest. As some would say we were basically in the middle of nowhere. My first assumption made was that the guys I'm going to be spending this whole day with are probably a bunch of redneck bumpkins who I wouldn't have the first thing in common with... As the trip went on my opinion changed drastically.

I stepped out of the car to take a good look at my surroundings when I heard the intense barking from multiple dogs to the right of me. Right off the top I knew these were the coonhounds but I had no idea how vicious some of these animals could actually be. As we entered the house I had the pleasure to meet Donovan's family as we waited for his arrival back to the house from his deer hunt that day. This is when I realized that these boys must live and breath hunting to the fullest level. Finally a brown shaggy haired guy walked in wearing all camouflage and came and introduced himself to me as Donovan. He made me feel right at home as one of the next things he said was "Are you ready to go hunting man?!" in a really enthusiastic voice which got me pretty excited. He then even set me up with the proper equipment by lending me a pair of camouflage waterproof boots that I could wear during the hunt. As we were getting ready to go Donovan got a call from his

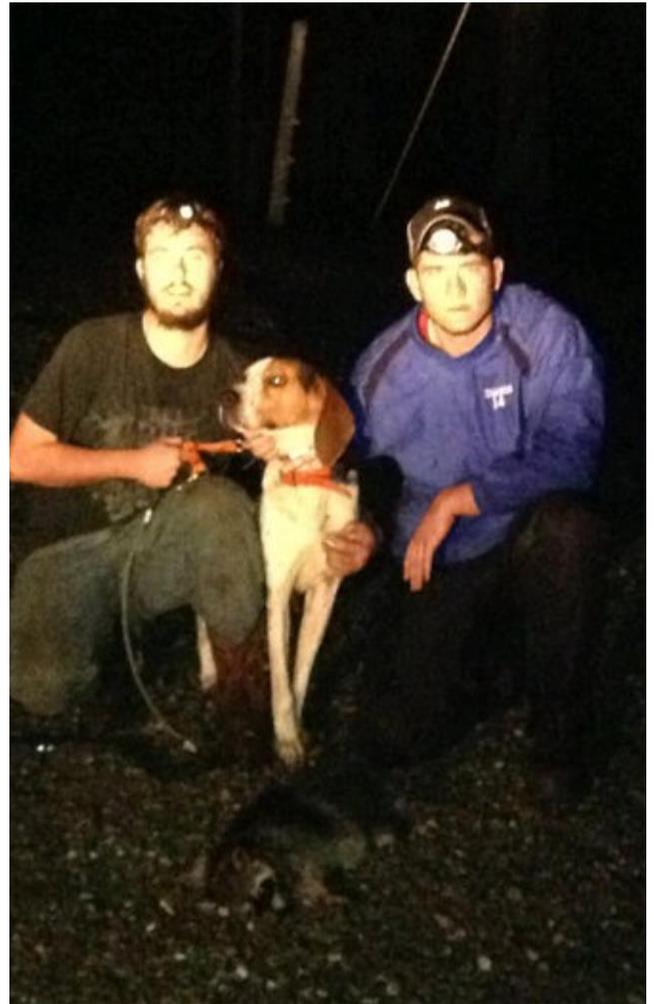
friend Shelby Guinn who had just killed a buck and told us to head on over to his house.

Shelby's House: Meeting the Boys

I had no idea what to expect as we pulled into Shelby's house. He said the other two guys we were going to hunt with that night. As soon as we got out of the car Shelby ran up and introduced himself and instantly brought us to the buck he shot that day. I had never seen a dead buck hung up the way this one was before so that was definitely a new experience for me. We then went inside and we ate their homemade deer jerky while we waited for the rest of the gang to show up. As we sat in his kitchen Shelby's brother Jeremy finally came home and waited with us. As I got to get to know these guys through small talk I learned that Donovan owned his own car shop that he worked on most of the week, Shelby and Jeremy were diesel mechanics that also did a lawn mowing service during the summer to make extra money. As we continued talking Shelby received a phone call from their other friend Brandon Ferguson who said he would meet us at Donovan's house to get ready for the hunt. Since I had never been hunting before I was honestly really nervous but also excited at the same time. Regardless there was no point in nerves at that point so we headed on over to Donovan's.

The Hunt

As we arrived at Donovan's house we were greeted by Brandon who informed us that one of Donovan's dogs had gotten loose and went down in the woods in the backyard. I could hear the dog's short choppy barks in the distance and then saw that all the guys were laughing. I asked what was so funny and Shelby responded, "She already done treed a coon!" this is when I first was able to big up on the difference in barking signals that the dogs can give off. Right before we went down Donovan gave me a .22 caliber rifle and told me to carry it which was the first time I had ever carried a gun. I learned from this that even in a whole party of coon hunters they really only need one gun. Nate told me they used the .22 because it was quiet enough so they wouldn't wake up anybody who lived nearby where they were hunting. We headed on down to the woods and had to walk for a good half mile to find the dog. At first I fell behind because I wasn't used to this kind of terrain and really had to work to keep up. We finally got to the dog and I saw all



*Donovan (left) and Nate (Right)
with a Walker Coonhound before*

the boys shine their hat lights up into the tree to start looking for the coon. I noticed that they didn't use any different colored light covers. I asked why they didn't and they told me it was just their personal preference. After a while they decided to give up because Donovan said "This dog is usually doesn't even tree any coons" he then mentioned how when a dog can't tree coons correctly they're sold or traded off almost right away.

We took the dog up to the trucks where we then grabbed the other 3 dogs and attached each one with GPS tracking collars. Afterwards we loaded up the 4 hounds into the most heavy-duty dog cages I've ever seen. We hopped in the truck and Donovan said "We're gonna head to our first drop site" which I later learned the drop site is the location where they let the dogs run loose. There are certain drop sites they said they knew of that produced more raccoons than others so we went to the best one. Once we got there they just opened the cages right up and let the hounds run loose. I noticed that one of the four dogs wouldn't run out into the woods with the others and that was the one who Donovan said he was planning on getting rid of soon. I wasn't sure what to do next until I saw the boys sit on the tailgate of the truck and lit some cigarettes. I hopped right up there with them as we enjoyed the quiet and darkness of the night. The only noise that could be heard was the hounds barking as they trailed through the backwoods looking for coons to tree. At this point I really started to feel like a member of the group as they played jokes on me and kept me in on their conversations.

After about 20 minutes Donovan took a look at the GPS tracker and I saw how it showed all the dogs treed. I heard Jeremy say, "It's go time boys!" as a signal

to get off the truck and head into the dark woods. Once again I ended up falling behind but luckily Nate waited up for me because I didn't have a light to guide myself. The woods we were in were incredibly steep like I was walking down a mountain. After about a mile of trekking through the woods I must've fallen at least 5 times and got a face full of thorns from a bush I ran into. It ended up being something we all laughed about as we approached the hounds that were all 3 by the tree where the raccoon was.

Everyone shined their lights up on the tall tree, taking different angles in pursuit to find the eyes of the raccoon. Nate and I sat down in the back to watch the men at work until someone shouted out "There he is!" and before I even knew it I felt the barrel of the rifle go across my shoulder. I

turned around and saw that Donovan was using my shoulder to steady his aim for the shot, which scared me at first but I put my trust into him. He took the first shot and to my surprise the gun sounded slightly louder than the noise a BB gun makes. Donovan ended up missing his first shot but then you could hear the raccoon move further up into the tree. Once he was relocated Donovan took another shot, which



Nate holding the raccoon we shot

must've hit the raccoon because it fell right out of that tree into the clutches of the 3 hounds that were waiting below. I won't go into heavy detail but let's just say those dogs made that raccoon look like a ragdoll.

Once it was all said and done we turned off all the lights, grabbed the dogs, and just sat in the darkness and enjoyed the backwoods. It was honestly one of the most beautiful experiences of my life just looking at the stars and listening to the boys talk about their old hunting stories as kids. This is when I realized this is more than just hunting, it was something they built a brotherhood off of, something they grew up doing, and something they'll most likely continue to enjoy for the rest of their lives. After a while we all got up and Shelby said, "The greenhorn has got to carry the coon out the woods" it took me a moment to realize he was talking about me. A greenhorn is someone who is new to a certain activity and after that day I was a greenhorn no more. I proudly went down by that tree and grabbed that raccoon by the tail and carried it out of the woods. We ended up going to 3 separate drop sites that night and treed a coon at every single one, we only ended up shooting one raccoon out but it was a great one.

Conclusion

After my stay in Clinton County with all the boys I learned a lot. Not only about the history and the tradition of coon hunting but also I had the opportunity to assimilate into a group of guys I would not have met otherwise. I shot my first rifle, carried my first dead raccoon, I trekked it through the woods for miles, and I had a

great time while doing it. I learned more in one single night than I had in a long time, while it might not be things applicable to school it was something new.

It was one of the more simple nights I have had recently but I was able to gain the most from it. At the start of the trip I made initial judgments on these guys who ended up just being your everyday people. These are all hardworking men who have their own lives, responsibilities, and troubles and they come together a few nights a week just to continue their hobby. While they live a different lifestyle than me and do different things than me, I was able to become an insider and live a day in their shoes. After this experience I hope to continue to learn the sport of hunting whether it's raccoon's or some other type of game. I already have our next hunt scheduled for 2 weeks into winter break and I'm more than excited to go back!

Bibliography

- 1) Mason, Alexa 2013. Coon Hunters Club: "The History of Coon Hunting".
- 2) Rakow, Bob 1998. "Raccoon Hunting Basics and Beyond".