



**BOW  
HUNTING** *the*  
**Sierra Madre**  
**MOUNTAINS OF MEXICO**

STORY AND PHOTOS BY BRAD CHILES

Brad Chiles



**W**hen I started turkey hunting back in the mid 80's, I never imagined where my love for the sport would take me or the awesome places I have been able to visit chasing these beautiful birds, not to mention, the great friends I would meet along the way. Some 25 years later, a friend and colleague, Brian Boatner, walked into my cubicle at work one afternoon and told me he had just paid a deposit on a turkey hunt with Steve Brown of Brown & Company Outfitters. Steve and I have been friends for many years, and I knew, if he was involved, it would be a great hunt.

"Where are we going this year?" I asked, and when Brian replied, "Old Mexico for the Gould's," I almost fell out of my chair! I could not believe I was going to have the opportunity to bow hunt the Gould's. I have taken a few Easterns and Rio Grandes with my bow and had taken an Osceola gobbler in Florida the previous year with my bow, so my hopes of taking all the North American sub-species with archery tackle, were suddenly looking up. This was going to be an adventure and hunting trip that previously, I had only dreamed of.

The months leading up to the hunt were full of questions for Steve since neither Brian nor I had been to Mexico. Hearing all of the horror stories of the dangers of crossing the border and dealing with the Mexican law enforcement agencies, we could not help but be concerned about our safety. Steve has personally hunted and guided hunts in Mexico for many years and assured us that he had not had any problems.

Two weeks prior to our hunt, Brian accepted a meeting with a potential client that he had been working with for several years. Unfortunately, the timing of the meeting prevented him from making our trip; however, he did secure his client's business. Steve informed me that another friend, Ken Phillips, was booked to go on the hunt also and would be in our group. Although Brian could not join us, I was excited to have another familiar face on the trip. Ken and I have hunted together for many years. In fact, I killed my first turkey with a bow in Texas while hunting with Ken and his dad.

My flight landed in El Paso, TX around 9 pm – plenty of time for me to get some rest before departing the next day. However, sleep did not come easily for me because the anticipation of this hunt was similar to those nights before opening day of dove season when I was a kid. Our hunting group met in the hotel lobby for breakfast around 6 am the next morning. Our Mexican outfitters arrived at 7 am, so we loaded up with Jorge and Horacio with Apache Refuge Outfitters and began the first leg of our day's trip.

We drove from El Paso about an hour west to the border crossing in Columbus, NM. Although several of us had not traveled across the border and we were fairly nervous about leaving the United States, crossing went very smoothly. I was grateful that Jorge personally knew the Mexican Border Patrol personnel and had dealt with them on many occasions with other hunters.

We headed south about two hours

to Casas Grandes, Chihuahua and swapped into the trucks we would take into the mountains. We made one last stop in Colonial Juarez to meet another man by the name of Jorge and his son, Jorge, who went by "Coco" - thank goodness (I'm not kidding!). Finally, we headed for their ranch in the Sierra Madres mountains. When the pavement ended Horacio told us that we had about three and a half hours of mountain roads remaining to reach the camp. The roads were very rough but the scenery was absolutely beautiful.

We arrived at camp at 4 pm, and we quickly unloaded, grabbed our turkey hunting gear and hit the mountains to chase the beautiful Gould's turkeys. "Coco" took Ken and me up to a natural seep in a meadow that wasn't very far from our camp in hopes we would catch some birds coming in for a late afternoon drink of water. Ken and I settled into a blind that I had brought with me, and it wasn't long before the action began.

Gobbling on the ridge out in front of us, the first bird we spotted had several hens with him, and we eagerly watched as they began making their way down toward the water. Another bird gobbled from behind and to our left. When the gobbler in front of us got to about 25 yards, I told Ken to go ahead and let him have the opportunity with the shotgun.

In my mind, I had it all figured out. I surmised that when Ken's bird went down, the second gobbler that had been behind us and was now only 10 yards to our left would jump on the flopping gobbler and I could put an arrow in him. It was going to be epic!

However, as we all know when it comes to hunting, that what happens in our minds can often turn out the complete opposite. And this time was no exception. When Ken pulled the trigger, he sent a load of #6s over the turkey's head, and the gig was up. It was an exciting hunt, and I always enjoy ribbing Ken about ruining my chances on my first Gould's gobbler.

The next morning I went out with Horacio to a spot called, "Cuchillo," which is Spanish for knife. It was a finger ridge with large ponderosa pines where, I was told, gobblers

like to strut. It was a cool morning, probably 45 or 50 degrees, and it was going to be a beautiful day. We set up the blind and put out a jake and 2 hen decoys. When the sun started to come up, we could hear several birds gobbling on the next ridge. After they flew down they gobbled for a while and we could hear several hens with them. We stayed in the blind because Horacio assured me that they would come to this place to strut at some point. We had not heard a gobbler for quite some time, so about 9 am, I picked up my Cody slate call. I let out

a series of yelps, and a gobbler cut me off about 150 yards down the ridge. I gave him about 5 minutes and called again, and he cut me off again, this time just out of sight down the ridge.

I was breathing heavier now, and I will never forget seeing his blood red head coming up the ridge about 50 yards out. Not long after I saw him, he saw our decoys and focused his attention on them. He did not like the fact that the jake decoy was hanging out with his hens. When he got to the decoys, I drew my bow, the turkey turned broadside, and I squeezed my release. The arrow hit him just above the thighs and he went about 15 yards and piled up in a downed tree limb. I was beyond excited that I had killed my first Gould's turkey, which turned out to be a beautiful double bearded gobbler with the snow white band across the ends of his tail feathers. When we got back to camp, several of the other hunters had taken nice Toms as well. It was a great first morning, to say the least.

Two days of intensive travel and an early rise will wear a hunter out, so after lunch, we took a short nap. Later that afternoon, I was told I would go out with Horacio again for the afternoon hunt, and we were going to a partially dried up lake where the turkeys like to water. It was getting late in the afternoon, and I was beginning to think it was probably over for the day, so I was teaching Horacio how to run my Cody slate call to pass time. He caught on to it very quickly and on his third or fourth series of yelps, a turkey gobbled about as far away as I can hear one. I waited two or three minutes and told him



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to yelp again, and this time a hen answered in the same direction of the gobbler. I told Horacio to just mimic what she was doing, and each time he did, she called back every time.

After about five minutes of calling, seven or eight hens came walking in with a big gobbler in tow. When they came into our decoys, the Tom acted as if he didn't like my jake decoy and started skirting around him. I drew my bow and took a 10 yard quartering-away shot. The arrow went in half way between the top of his tail and the wing butt putting him down in less than 10 yards.

He was a really nice bird, the tips of his tail feathers were even whiter than the one I took on the morning hunt. As I got set to take some pictures of my bird, Horacio went

to look at his beard, and we realized this bird also had multiple beards – 4 of them! I had been turkey hunting for over 25 years and never killed a multiple-bearded turkey before and I had just gotten two on the same day in Mexico. I was beyond thrilled and excited!

Each hunter in our group had a two bird limit on this hunt, so the next three days I went out with some of the others to hunt with and watch them get their birds. I was able to hunt with Steve one morning and was with him when he shot a beautiful Gould's gobbler with his bow. The mid-day and late evenings I spent hanging out camp, eating authentic Mexican food, and sharing tales of hunts on the porch. At the end of the trip, everyone was successful

at filling their two-bird limit, and I was grateful for the opportunity to experience something I had never done before. A little older and wiser than I was back in the 80's when I first started turkey hunting and only lacking the Merriam's now to complete an Archery Royal Slam, I will never forget my first successful Gould's hunt in the Sierra Madre mountains of Mexico. The high mountain ridges, beautiful scenery, and the new friendships formed and existing friendships strengthened on this adventure are all part of this sport that I will never take for granted.

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