

Brad Dye



GROUND BLIND BUCKET LIST

STORY & PHOTOS BY BRAD DYE

I drove home from a meeting in New Orleans, unpacked, repacked, and headed to a football game. All week, I had watched the forecast and, as I drove to the game, I thought about the cool, crisp morning to come. The game finished early which stoked my fire even more. I had parked so I could make a quick escape and the thought of getting to bed early made me happy--even would certainly be better than midnight. The five a.m. alarm still came early; however, a hot cup of coffee cut the chill of the morning sip by sip. As I drank my coffee, I read the Outdoors page of the *Meridian Star* I had thrown in my bag as I walked out of the house and relived an elk hunt with Otha Barham.

As I stepped into the morning air, I was rewarded with what I had envisioned all week--crisp and cool. No wind, I thought as I crunched down the leaf-covered trail toward my destination. This morning would be a "bucket-list" morning, as I had decided to hunt with my bow from a pop-up blind in pursuit of a Mississippi whitetail. I had been dreaming lately about taking a deer from a ground blind and as I unfurled my Primo's Double Bull Blind in the darkness, I began to visualize how the morning would play out. The deer would come from my left from the thicket that I faced, and I could watch them walk the trail toward my blind as I prepared for the shot--my heart raced as I positioned the blind.

As the sun greeted the morning, I felt whole. This place is beautiful, I thought. I always feel whole when I am here. I feel connected to this place and although I did not grow up hunting these woods, they have, nonetheless, always felt familiar to

me. Shortly after seven, I could hear footfalls in the leaves behind my blind. Maybe a squirrel, I thought, or perhaps a deer coming from the oak flat to my right. This was not the way I had drawn it up in my mind, as is usually the case with bow hunting.

As a young bowhunter, I read the stories of Fred Bear and always dreamed of taking a deer from a ground blind just as I had seen the felt hat-wearing master do in the photographs that accompanied his tales. As I sat in the blind this morning, I remembered the work days with my dad at the Red Hills Hunting Club preparing ground blinds just the way Bear had made his. I was never able to take a deer with my dad from those blinds, but I did miss a few. I also made memories that to this day are as vivid as the day they occurred. At twenty after seven on this particular morning, a big doe stepped into view to the right of my blind and the dense cover between us gave me the opportunity I needed. This could actually happen! As she made her way into range, I drew my bow and held for her to step into the “V” formed by a small Sweetgum tree eighteen yards in front of my blind.

I marked the time of the shot as 7:27. I replayed the shot in my mind



Dan Dye

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and retraced the path I had watched the deer run after the shot. Was it a good shot? The mental replay said yes, but I wanted to make sure. I would give her time. I backed out on the trail we had both used to make our entry and sought warmth from another cup of coffee.

I know many of the readers of these pages have hunted all over the world and may not think too much of the “adventure” I have just described. A doe in Mississippi? Bucket list? However, for me, the lure of bowhunting has always boiled down to the thrill of being close, the challenge of getting closer. My heart still races when a deer comes into bow range, even a doe, and I think when this is no longer the case, I will put down my bow. Having finished my coffee and given the doe ample time to expire, I ventured out to claim my trophy. I am always amazed at the toughness of the white-tailed deer. Even with a lung shot, the doe managed to run over 150 yards through the woods and over a rise. I was as thrilled with this doe as I had been with any buck I had ever taken.

It’s funny--the timing of things. I have been working on this story for *Mississippi BowHunter* over the course of my son Dan’s final week at home before we move



Dan Dye

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him to Starkville to start his college experience at Mississippi State University and, as a result of those events, the story has taken a different turn. I have to brag just a bit as Dan was one of 25 students to be selected as part of Mississippi State's Early Entry Program at the College of Veterinary Medicine. Dan would tell you that his selection to the EEP is certainly a bucket list item for him. I remember him checking our animals with his toy vet kit when he was just a lad. I also remember vividly every hunt we have ever been on together--his first deer, his first turkey, and his first miss with a bow. That miss was special.

Looking back on that miss, the scene is as clear as the day we were there. Dan and I were in a blind that my good friend and outfitter, Steve Brown, had set up for us on his personal property in Macon. It was a hot evening in October and the mosquitos were ravenous. I can still see them exiting the blind en masse as the Thermacell worked its magic. Throughout the afternoon, we had seen numerous does and small bucks; however, none had presented a good shot for Dan. Finally, as the sun began to set, a big doe made her way down a trail that ran about twenty yards in front of our blind. I watched Dan intently and knew exactly what he was feeling as he drew back his Mathews and focused on the sight pin and the doe's vitals. I watched as the arrow sailed just over her back and I watched Dan's facial expression as he processed what had happened. It took me back to the ground blind that my dad had constructed. I could see a young man about Dan's age running up to the ground blind with a face marked with excitement, excitement



Dan Dye with his cousin, Billy VanVeekhoven

over a miss. You see, I had sailed an arrow over the back of a doe and she actually stood still long enough for me to nock another arrow, take another shot, and sail another arrow over her back.

None of that chain of events would be too strange except for the "quiver" I was using. I had ordered a new Kwikey Kwiver from Cabela's and the quiver had not arrived in time for opening day. My dad and I both reasoned that it would be unsafe to try to transport arrows with broadheads (Bear Razorheads) without a quiver, so we improvised. I had ordered a dozen arrows before season and still had the box and plastic arrow holders that had been used for shipping. The box became my quiver and the quiver lay closed at my feet after I sailed the first arrow over the doe's back. She stood there twenty yards from my ground blind as I opened the box, nocked an arrow, and proceeded to miss again. Needless to say, she did not linger for a third shot. I dropped my bow and ran the two or three hundred yards through the woods to my dad's

blind to tell him the exciting news. I can still see the smile on his face and hear his laughter.

I can also still see the excitement and smiles on Dan's face and hear the laughter from each hunt we have made over the years. As cliché as it may sound, it seems like only yesterday that Dan caught his first fish or shot his first deer or turkey, and now he wants a key to the camp so he can come and go while he's away at college. I'm not ready for that. I want to be with him in the backyard as we practice shooting our bows. I want to be with him in the blind as he takes aim and shoots, and yes, even misses. My bucket list has shifted a bit through the years; watching my son take off with his skills (life and hunting!) in tow is now at the top. A doe in Mississippi with my bow from a ground blind? A close second.