

SKULL

AN OUTFITTER'S JOURNAL

JOSH'S BIG TOM
FATHER & SON DOUBLE
2 BIRD IN 10 MINUTES

special edition

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FATHER and SON

My son Joshua has always been interested in my pheasant hunts and would jump at the opportunity to tag along as my golden and I chased pheasants across the eastern plains of Colorado. In the spring, I would inevitably find him transfixed on the outdoor channels watching turkey hunts, so we added a hunt to our father and son bucket list.

Luckily in the spring of 2020, despite being at the peak Covid pandemic fear, Josh (13 years old) and I were able to pull-off a hunt with Sandy Hills

Hunting Co. in the beautiful southern mountains of Colorado.

We met with our guides Neil and Tanner at 4 AM outside our hotel to start the day. The next couple of hours would become an almost unbelievable hunt and lifelong memory.

We moved crept through the foothills and into a cottonwood creek bottom. After a short hike through scrub oak and meadows, we bunkered down behind an open field and waited for the

sun to rise. To say we were overwhelmed was no understatement. This was our first hunt, and were both unsure of ourselves. Based on our upland experience, we were expecting for things to move slow and had planned to be in the field for several days. As the sun broke, we were treated to a red fox running down a game trail on his way home. Shortly after, the guides began calling and we waited in the cold for the action to begin. After about 15 to 30 minutes of calling with no return calls, the guides began discussing options. The decision was quickly made to move higher up the mountain in

search of the birds. So we packed up and headed back to our cars. Given Covid precautions we were in the unusual situation of being in separate cars. The guides in the lead truck led us up a jeep trail.

After a short drive in the early morning light, our guide stopped and began to reverse down the hill. At this point, the closest thing to what I would describe as a running gun fight began. Tanner and Neil quickly exited their truck, and approached us. They were whispering and instructed us to get our shotguns out of the trunk and to be ready. As



“Dad, why am
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I was still loading my son's gun and within seconds, Tanner returned and excitedly grabbed Josh (almost by the collar) and led him out into the forest and amongst some fallen timber. In the rush, I had handed Josh my side-by-side 16 gauge with only 1 shell loaded, so I handed Neil some additional shells. I grabbed his 20 gauged, loaded 3 shells, and Neil and I followed. As we approached, I saw Josh and Tanner about 20 yards ahead of us in fallen timber and crouched down. Tanner had a decoy and was moving Josh slowly forward through scattered deadfall. A large Tom was on the opposite side of a small clearing and moving through the timber quickly towards us. Moments later, Josh took his only shot and bagged his first turkey! The Tom was a truly magnificent bird and as almost as big as my son. Josh was over the moon with pride. We spent the next few moments high fiving each other, discussing whether to break to let things settle down, and taking pictures to capture the moment. Suddenly another gobble coming from up the jeep trail and broke the silence. The guides whispered "get down", and we all hit the ground as if

we were under fire. A somewhat younger Tom was moving down the road to what I can only assume was to finish his argument with our bird. The Tom was in a hurry and closed to within 15 yards without pausing. Tanner flashed him the decoy several times, although I don't think it mattered, and I was able to make a clean kill at about 5 yards. Josh and I had shot our limit with at most 10 minutes of each other and before it was 7 AM on the first day.

We decided to move down mountain to take some more photos, clean our birds, and regroup. One of my favorite memories of the hunt took place as we got back into our cars and headed down the mountain. As we drove away, my son looked at me and innocently asked, "Dad, why am I shaking?" His eyes were as big as saucers and he was shaking as he held out his hands. I was delighted and chuckled as I explained to him, son that is adrenaline. Both Toms were beautiful, the mountain timber and setting were incredible, and we made a memory for a lifetime. What a day and what a great way to start a young turkey hunter out in the sport!