

Now would be a good time book a hog hunt

BY JIM NIEMIEC
WON Staff Writer

CARRIZO PLAIN – It’s kind of a down-time for hunters with only some game in season, but thankfully wild hogs are on the list that can be hunted now. *Western Outdoor News* booked a midweek hunt with Clayton Grant, owner/operator of Bitterwater Outfitters (805-610-4521) based out of Cholame

this past week. On the drive up to ranch headquarters, fields and hill-sides didn’t look all that promising with little rain to produce any kind of harvestable barley crop. Most all the fields, leading up into the head of Bitterwater Valley, showed just short stubble and many of the ranch properties had already been tilled under and ready for more rain from Mother Nature. On

the bright side there were plenty of dove winging though the valley and a couple of coyotes looked pretty healthy.

This hunting writer was greeted at the ranch by Terry F., who took care of all the paperwork and then suggested that we head over to the rifle range to sight in my Weatherby Mark V 7mm-Mag, as it had been in the gun safe for nearly three years, due partly to travel restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. This ranch hand had been an active rifle shooter for over 40 years and was pretty good at making scope adjustments to bring a hunter’s rifle sighted-in to shoot a good group around the bullseye.

WON then checked into one of the rental cabins on the home ranch that looks over a pond loaded with bass, catfish and bluegill. While sitting on the porch, it was relaxing in the shade and enjoyable to see nature come alive at this water hole with dove winging in and watching a pair of mallards slurping bugs.

The hunt evening hunt was set to start at 5:30 p.m. and that’s when Grant and ranch guide Blayne Twisselman showed up with an ATV being trailered behind a RAM 4X4. We would be making about a 40-minute drive over to a huge

working cattle ranch close to Soda Lake (now dry) that is game rich with hogs, Tule elk, deer, varmints and upland game birds. At the locked entrance to the ranch, we were met up with master guide Jake Twisselman and two pig hunters from Reno who joined in on the hunt.

Blayne and this hunter followed the ATV into a lush meadow area of the ranch. The hot days of this part of the Carrizo Plains normally will force pigs to head to water early and such was the case for this hunt. A group of 7 hogs were spotted in an adjoining hill side. Grant’s and Twisselman’s knowledge of game on this ranch resulted in the harvest of two hogs tagged and the elapsed time of their hunt was less than an hour.

It was then this writer’s time to sit in the shooter’s seat of the ATV. The temp was dropping, especially in the more shaded valleys of the ranch, but game was plentiful with a herd of some 40 Tule elk on the move, a dandy blacktail buck standing in the shade of a stately old oak tree, a couple of coyotes off to the races, a soaring golden eagle and lots of dove around. We passed on a couple sows that were cresting a ridge, checked out a small group of hogs moving away from a watering hole and then made a move to another part of the ranch as the sun was setting... *prime hog time!*

The ATV worked slowly across the valley floor, with both of my guides at full alert with binoculars scanned for movement. There is a unique area of this ranch that offers up a century-old creek bed with a stream of running water, lots of grass and tulles. Grant stopped a couple of times to check out some of the draws leading down

into the creek bed. Finally, he spotted a group of hogs heading back to the protective cover of sage. But before they could reach the cover, we all had exited the ATV and moved up along the canyon with shooting stick in hand.

After relocating a couple of times, as the hogs were on the move the rear pig (a boar) lagged a little behind a sow and three piglets, thus allowing time for clear shot. The shot was true, as the Weatherby Mark V pushed out a 140-grain Barnes copper bullet that smashed into the side of the boar at nearly 300 yards. The pig limped awkwardly up the hill, just topped the ridge and disappeared. It was a good shot, perhaps a couple of inches low, but the sound of the hit was a very good sign that the pig was not going too far, but we needed to retrace our tracks, cross the creek bed and then get to the spot where the hog had been.

Getting out of ATV, we spread out and it didn’t take more than a couple of minutes for Grant to motion he found the hog. It was less than 100 yards from where it had been shot and was a laying next to an oak tree. Twisselman made sure the hog was dead, as Grant and this hunter got back in the ATV to drive down to where the pig could be easily loaded. Grant filled out the tag and then we rejoined our fellow hunters as darkness fell on this Carrizo Plain ranch. It turned out to be a young boar, perhaps no more than 2.5 years old, weighed in at just a tad under 200 pounds and sported 1.5-inch ivory tucks.

WON talked with Grant about hunting as we drove back to the home ranch.

“As you witnessed, this part of the Carrizo Plain has plenty of game to hunt. In addition to this cattle ranch, we have leased another 280,000 acres of prime hunting ranches in parts of San Luis Obispo, Monterey, Kern and Fresno counties. All ranches are well managed and we have a very talented staff of guides who grew up hunting along the coastal range and inland valley,” said Grant.

As to options for hunting packages, Bitterwater Outfitters offers hog/turkey, hog/deer combo hunts that are very successful, fall turkey hunts with a few spots left for this season, a couple of trophy blacktail deer hunts and of course plenty of guided wild hog hunts. Also, other big game and exotics are available to hunt that includes: buffalo, Aoudad and Euro Boar. With the price of meat so high today, now would be a good time to hunt up a hog or other wild game and have it processed. This writer’s prime hog cuts will cook up well on the barbeque, while there will be plenty of sausage to last the rest of the year.

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CARRIZO PLAIN HOG – *WON* hunting writer Jim Niemiec shot this dandy boar while on a guided hunt with Clayton Grant and master-guide Jake Twisselman of Bitterwater Outfitters. The hog was shot with a Weatherby Mark V 7mmMag and Barnes 140-gr. copper bullet at a range of nearly 300 yards. PHOTO COURTESY OF BITTERWATER OUTFITTERS



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