

PASSING OLD SKILLS TO THE NEXT GENERATION

By Heidi Lyn Rao



All it takes to have a fun and exciting weekend, is a landowner who is overrun with nuisance furbearing animals and a bunch of young men and women who want to learn how to trap! I recently had the opportunity of being the “middleman” connecting a local rancher with a group of kids for this purpose. It was the perfect symbiotic relationship – a rancher experiencing property damage and livestock loss from raccoons, opossums, bobcats, and coyotes and a group of teenagers willing to thin out the population of these furbearers to help him out.

It all started with a phone call from Frank Galle of **Galle Ranch** in South Texas. The call went something like this – “Heidi, I have lost all my chickens, my fences are being damaged, and I need help getting rid of these varmints!” I offered up taking a group of responsible and knowledgeable young teenagers to his ranch, so I could teach them how to set traps to help remedy his situation. Knowing that Frank is very involved in youth hunts opportunities and has a

passion for introducing individuals to hunting and fishing, I was not surprised when he was onboard!



We set a date and gathered the kids. I knew it was not going to be your typical youth hunt. I had eight youth hunters (four boys and four girls), five parents, and five adult volunteers for this hunt. The youth hunt was set for a Friday, Saturday, and Sunday in late March.

The day came and we arrived at Galle Ranch. We were immediately greeted by our hosts, Frank and Gayle Galle. We were also greeted by ducks, chickens, a couple of dogs, and a curious and overly-friendly lamb named Pablo, also known for his “bushwacking” tendencies! Our accommodations were a large covered outdoor pavilion overlooking a catfish-stocked pond, and a huge grassy area where we could set up our camp for the weekend. The property is full of 300-year-old pecan and oak trees, yaupon, and palmetto palms. The property is also overrun with raccoons, opossums, bobcats, and coyotes. Add in the large sounders of feral hogs that were destroying everything they encountered, and you have your “typical” South Texas ranch.

The weekend that we chose was not the most ideal weather conditions for trapping. Saturday was forecasted to have a high of 86-degrees. Friday and Saturday were moonless nights. Nonetheless, we proceeded with our trapping as planned. On Friday afternoon, we set fifteen dog-proof traps and eight leghold traps.



After our sets were made, we returned to the pavilion to make “camp” at about 9:00 p.m. When we had our cots set up with our bedrolls placed on top, the kids spent the next hour laughing, playing cards, and fishing. At about 10:00 p.m., Frank could hardly contain himself and asked the kids if they would like to check the traps because the raccoons were moving early. Sure enough, we had our first catch, a fine raccoon. Hannah dispatched the first raccoon of the trip. We returned to camp around 11:30 p.m. By this time the kids were so tired they did not even make a campfire.

On Saturday morning we were up by 6:30 a.m. The kids cooked up a great breakfast of breakfast tacos. Frank and Gayle joined us for a hearty meal before we headed out. After eating and putting our bedrolls away, so we did not return to find Pablo the lamb fast asleep in someone’s bed, we loaded up in the side-by-sides and trucks and went out across the property to check traps.

Within a couple of hours, we had five raccoons in the back of the truck. Jady B., Jaydon Z., Cooper, and Hunter all dispatched fine raccoons. Before we headed back to camp, we set eight more dog-proof traps and eight leghold traps. The kids and their parents quickly learned how time-consuming and tedious trap-setting is!

We returned to camp for lunch about 1:30 p.m. in the afternoon. After lunch we lounged around, fished, and chatted among ourselves as we waited to go back to the field to set more traps later that afternoon. I took a couple of the kids who were new to shooting to the range on property to give them a quick lesson on the safe handling and use of single-action revolvers.

We had a bit of a surprise for the kids when we all gathered up before heading out again. We had an impromptu ceremony to recognize these young adults for all of their successes! The kids had no idea that they would be getting awards, certificates, patches and even medals. Gene, one of the Adult Advisors, showed up to present awards.



We opened our awards ceremony with a Flag Retirement Ceremony, removing the worn flag that flew over Galle Ranch, and presented Frank and Gayle with a brand new American Flag that is now flying high at the center of their ranch. Next, one by one, the kids were recognized, and a story was told on them as we all laughed about the memory before they were presented with their awards. We had been taking the kids to the gun range prior to this outing but these

young shooters and hunters did not know that they were completing awards out of the NRA Marksmanship Qualification Program.



Working through a progression of difficulty, each of these youth earned the Hunting Marksmanship Distinguished Expert award. This is a high award and everyone has been working very hard to achieve this! By passing various levels of shooting skills, and ultimately hunting an animal with a shotgun (waterfowl, pheasant, turkey), rifle (deer, prairie dogs), and pistol (raccoons, opossum), this high award was earned by all who were in attendance! Hannah B., Jadyn B., Jaydon Z., JohnJohn R., Luke R., Summer A., Cooper G., and Hunter D.

After the kids received their certificates and medals, we headed back out to the field to set more traps. Once in the field we set eight more dog-proof traps and eight more leghold traps. Dominic, 20 years old and an NRA Assistant Instructor, took the lead in teaching all the new trappers the correct way to set a leghold trap, place a backer, and add the appropriate lure for the target species. Aidan, 20 years old and also an NRA Assistant Instructor, took the lead on setting dog-proof traps, passing out trap-setting equipment, and keeping track of all the tools while teaching our new trappers the proper way to set.

We returned to camp around 6:30 p.m. To our delight, Stephen, another Adult Advisor, had dinner waiting for us. He created a Dutch Oven meal of bacon-wrapped chicken, baked beans, homemade bread, and plenty of appetizers to feed our hungry trappers. To cap it off,

Stephen broke out a homemade Dutch Oven peach cobbler topped with Vanilla Blue Bell ice cream! After dinner, we were entertained with “pearls of wisdom” from Frank, as Gayle served as a “fact-checker.” We all knew that Frank was stretching the truth a bit when Gayle would holler with laughter and say, “Oh, Frank!”



Around 9:30 p.m., we went to the field to check the traps. We already have a raccoon in a trap. Kaitlyn was up next. She was extremely nervous, but I talked her through it. Today was the first time Kaitlyn had shot a firearm. She went from being afraid of firearms on Friday, to

learning the proper and safe handling, dry firing and shooting at the range on Saturday afternoon, to taking her first animal Saturday evening!

We returned to camp around 11:00 p.m. and once again, everyone was too tired to start a campfire. The kids turned in quickly and were sound asleep. It was a very dark night with no moonlight. I knew that we probably would not catch very many varmints overnight and into the next morning.

We woke around 6:30 a.m. and again had a great meal of breakfast tacos. We were checking and pulling traps by 8:00 a.m. Not only was it a dark and moonless night, but it usually takes a week or so before traps are “found” and visited by furbearing animals. It is hard to take a lot of (nuisance) of animals with only a weekend of trapping.

As it were, I stand correct. We only took one raccoon in all the traps we set, but it was a big boar. Summer was the next shooter up and she quickly dispatched the big ‘coon. We returned to camp around 11:30 a.m. to clean up and break camp. Ryan, 16 years old and an NRA Apprentice Instructor, took all of the raccoons and showed the other kids how to strip the tail bone out of the tail, insert a straw, and fill it with salt. This way all the kids left with a souvenir of their first trapping campout.

When we were done breaking camp, we had one final presentation. Aidan was presented with the “Tiny Trapper Award” for taking a lead in keeping up with all the equipment. We then visited with Frank and Gayle one last time and said our goodbyes. In the end, we removed eight nuisance raccoons from the property and the kids and their parents learned a new way to hunt.

