

# A FLORIDA CAST AND BLAST

Article by Captain Lace Allenius & Photos by Captain Jeff Hagaman

As the sleepy North Florida December night embraced us, we could hear the crickets chirping while unloading our gear from the bed of the truck.

Painted white rocking chairs awaited us on the worn wooden porch, hinting at the wealth of memories that had been shared here for generations. The chill of the crisp night air nipped at my toes as I rolled my suitcase across the grass and into the historic



cracker house that would be my home for the next three days. We were here to experience a Cast and Blast (fishing and hunting) with the famous Florida Outdoor Experience and Capt. Jeff Hagaman was already building a crackling fire. I paused in a moment of silent reflection, taking in the wood planked aroma. Tomorrow morning we would be hunting with property owner Gray Drummond and I was ready to nestle down in my cozy bed.

Dawn came quickly and it was pitch black. The only audible sound was a lone owl hooting in the chilly morning. Silent and stealthy on our feet, we tiptoed down the wooded, leafy path. Spanish moss hung eerily from the brawny branches of the trees as the fresh morning sun peeped through the dappled terrain. It was a clandestine canopy of natural beauty, and my eyes beheld

a breathtaking sight. Climbing up into our wooden box blind, my heart was pummeling the inside of my chest with absolute adrenaline. All of my senses were tingling with expectation and my eyes were as round as quarters.

It's always very important to remain extremely quiet while hunting. Scent and wind direction are also big factors. You always want to sit with the wind in your face because you

don't want to be downwind of an animal. Deer and hogs have a more sensitive sense of smell



than humans and can pick up a scent from very far away. Each stand is set up differently depending on the wind. Ground blinds can be moved while the wooden box blinds are more permanent and generally aren't moved. While looking through your scope at the animal, it's important to remain calm, take four or five deep breaths and breathe out your last breath before you make your shot. This is to calm your breathing and heart rate so you can take a more steady shot. At the end of the day, we came back with a great hog.

Florida Outdoor Experience offers a wide array of activities for the outdoor sportsman. Depending on the season, there are deer, hogs, turkeys and alligators on the property to be hunted. The gorgeous historic cracker house



was built in the late 1800's and is located on the original wagon road to Cedar Key. It comes complete with a cookhouse, original well, plus the original syrup kettle and cane grinder. The term "cracker house" came from the early white settlers in Florida. The "cracker cowboys" of the 19th and early 20th centuries didn't use lassos, but instead used cow whips and dogs to herd or capture cattle. The term "cracker" is a reference to the crack of the whips used by early Florida settlers.

Cedar Key clams and stone crab claws, undoubtedly the freshest seafood in the area. Commercial fishing is prevalent here and the community is centered around the clamming industry. Loading up our Grizzly cooler and boating past the clambers, we headed to the oyster bars to cast for redfish. The wind had begun to kick up and I could feel the excitement building as we arrived at our spot. Pulling several fish into the boat with our Tsunami rods, we



had a few throwbacks. After a few more bites, we pulled in a beautiful red to take home. The sun reflected on its beautiful scales and I felt fulfilled with satisfaction from a great day of fishing.



The Florida Outdoor Experience makes me eager to share it with others and speak with those who have been introduced to it. I am looking forward to my next visit to the property and I also am very curious about alligator season. Practicing my aim and shooting at the range was exciting and the feel of the 308 Kimber rifle with a Swarovski scope was intense. This three-day journey was an endeavor of soul searching and even though

I declined to pull the trigger while hunting, the thrill of the hunt was exhilarating. As we drove down the dusty dirt road, we passed by a colony of honeybee hives. The sun was low in the sky and a golden glow shone through the trees. It's a true fantasyland in this gorgeous Florida environment, so I took a deep breath and soaked it all in again. ▣

The morning sun mirrored off the glistening marshes as we headed out to the marina. At dawn, we had tiptoed out to the field behind the house to stalk Capt. Jeff's choice buck. The sun continued to ascend as we took the old wagon road out of town to Cedar Key for our fishing excursion. Pulling into the gas station to fuel our boat there were signs for