

California Hog Hunter

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Big wild boars abound on Indian Rock Ranch in southern Sierra

By JIM MATTHEWS

California Hog Hunter Editor

Two evenings in a row the big boar came up out of the Poso Creek bottom and into the pasture adjacent to the creek bed on Indian Rock Ranch.

Long-time friend and guide Ron Gayer said the hog had been feeding in the pasture off and on for over two weeks. My hunting partner Bob Robb said I should shoot that pig the first evening of our hunt. I told him I didn't want to shoot another big boar. I wanted a smaller meat pig.

"You should shoot it," I told him. We argued about it, laughed, argued some



Bob Robb whacked this big boar while hunting with guide Ron Gayer on Indian Rock Ranch. The pig was shot through both lungs with a .358 Winchester in a vintage Savage Model 99 at about 100 yards. The pig went into a stiff-legged death run but Bob put a second shot into the hog that broke its spine and killed it immediately.

more, and by then it was too dark to see the hog any longer. I had convinced Bob the hog was his if we saw it again.

The second night the same big boar came up into the pasture again. This time Bob and Ron were sitting in a pop-up ground blind. Bob had his bow and arrow in an attempt to stick the monster. But the hog kept looking at the newly-erected blind, milling around, and not stopping when it was in range. It just wasn't comfortable. Finally the big boar circled around behind the blind, caught the hunters' scents and trotted (Continued on 4, see *Indian...*)

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Eradication of wild hogs for what reason?

There is a short story in the Guides & Outfitter Reports pages of this issue about how a hog eradication program funded and run by the Nature Conservancy on a property in the Tehachapi area might put a local hog hunting guide out of business. It's all about removing the non-native species in TNC's eyes. They argue that hogs are destroying oaks along with other species and their habitats (without anything but anecdotal evidence and no science). Yet, non-native cattle will continue to graze (for now) under the guise of fire control.

The sad part is the hogs will be back in a year or three. Worse, no one has thought about that the hogs might be refilling a void left by the extinct grizzly bear, which also rooted under the oaks and probably helped seedlings to sprout.

The Nature Conservancy has preserves in other states where hunting is a part of the program. Why not here? Why not have an ongoing hunting program to control the pig numbers which are going to come back in spite of their efforts?

This mentality is a problem throughout today's environmental community, conservancies, and across government agencies — including many within our own state Department of Fish and Wildlife. They've forgotten that hunting is a tool they could use, or that wild pigs might actually serve a purpose. One of those purposes might be feeding mountain lions and wolves they all want to again flourish here. Today, human hunting is an activity they revile. That attitude is rampant.

The Cleveland National Forest spent millions of dollars to kill pigs on the forest a few years ago. They got most of

them, but there are already reports from hunters the hogs are coming back from surrounding properties. Wasted money?

Municipalities, water districts, and state parks throughout California, from the Central Coast to the Bay Area and points north, have wild hogs on their properties. With few exceptions, they don't have public hunting programs on this open space. Instead the state Department of Fish and Wildlife grants them carte blanche to hire professionals to kill them off. More wasted money. This is the height of stupidity.

Why pay to have wild hogs removed over and over again, when a hunting program — which would make money for the agencies and groups — will keep hog numbers in check?

The DFW could make this happen overnight if it had the political courage to force all groups and agencies to look at the public hunting option as it's first choice in managing wild hog problems and damage. Depredation permits should be a last resort if public hunting could be used.

The DFW could manage the hog hunting programs on these lands with the money it receives for hog tags. It would be a simple process. It would increase hunter opportunity. It would help solve very real wild hog damage problems.

It will never happen because the DFW management has no interest in solving the pig problem or helping hunters. It's single biggest goal today is to stay below the radar.



About Us

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California Hog Hunter is dedicated to bringing you information on where to hunt wild hogs throughout the state on both public and private lands. We also strive to keep you informed on news and products that relate to hog hunting in California.

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Indian....

(Continued from Page 1)

back off into the creek bottom and disappeared.

Bob and I have been friends since the 1970s when we both worked at *Western Outdoor News*, and we talked too late into the evening catching up. He said he was going to use a rifle to shoot that old pig if the hog gave him another chance the next evening. The next morning, Ron thought the possibility of the hog returning was good. He didn't think the hog was too spooked, and it had been feeding in that pasture for a couple of weeks.

That evening the hog showed back up. Not seeing the ground blind this time made him more comfortable. He didn't hesitate and headed for the pasture. Little did he know that three hunters were sitting about 100 yards away with a .358 Winchester rifle. Ron was giving a quietly whispered commentary as the pig approached.

"He's coming under the fence. He's moving into the pasture. He's turning broadside. Stopped." The word *stopped* was hardly out of Ron's mouth when the rifle roared and we



This is the deck off the bunkhouse that serves as the main dining and living area when hunters are not in the field. Poso Creek is located in the background of this photo, and it is common to see deer, pigs, and turkey from here.

could hear the whomp of a solid hit. The pig broke into a run that looped back the way it had come. The further he ran the more stiff-legged the motions became. When the pig cleared a screen of brush, Bob swung with the hog and shot again. Another whomp and the pig's nose dropped into the dirt and he almost did a summersault.

We went down to the field to field dress the hog and bring it back to the skinning rack at the camp. That was when we realized the size of the hog. There was no ground shrinkage on this animal. It was a big hog. It took all three of us to load the 300-pound class animal into the Arctic Cat four-wheeler.

Ron Gayer has been a guide and outfitter all over the West and in Alaska for over 40 years. He has been running the operation on Indian Rock Ranch for the past eight years, and hunts pigs, turkeys, black bears, and deer on his home ranch and other adjoining and nearby properties. All together, he hunts on at least 20,000 acres along Poso Creek and Cedar Creek near the town of Glennville on the west slope of the Sierra Nevada. The country is all oak savannah that is between 3,000 and 4,000 feet in elevation. The ranches Gayer hunts date back to the Gold Rush era when a handful of families started buying up land in the area around Glennville. It has a long ranching and hunting history.

The hunting heritage goes back well before settlers started living in these foothills and running cattle. The region has been hunted for thousands of years by native Californians who passed through this area each spring and fall, moving between the higher elevation in the summer and the San Joaquin Valley in the winter months. The ranch received its name from the many Indian grinding rocks along the major creeks in the region.

The Indians would camp for weeks at a time, gathering acorns and grinding them into flour. And of course they would hunt. Deer used the area year-around, but this area was likely home to tule elk, at least seasonally. Pronghorn antelope might even occasionally have ventured out of the valley up into these elevations. Grizzly bears were also a part of the
(Continued on Page 5, See *Indian....*)



Indian Rock Ranch gets its name from a number of Indian grinding rocks that are scattered all along Poso Creek that cuts through the main ranch property right below the hunting camp. It is clear native Californians used the area long before the first ranchers arrived in the 1800s.



Ron Gayer (left) peers through the oaks to pick a young boar out of group of hogs on the Indian Rock Ranch for Logan Hoots. Shooting off sticks, Hoots made a perfect shot with a .243 that dropped the pig instantly.

Indian....

(Continued from Page 4)
landscape in that era.

Today, black bears and hogs have replaced the grizzly bears rooting under the oak trees. Cattle have replaced the tule elk. Turkeys have returned from a different epoch, and the California mule deer have always been here. When hiking the ridges here, it is easy to imagine a different time.

Gayer's hunts for hogs or turkey cost \$1,575 per person, although he does offer a discount to junior hunters who come with a full-paying adult. The fee includes two nights lodging and meals the whole time on the ranch. For that price, a hunter can shoot one or two hogs. Deer and bear hunts are five-day, all-inclusive affairs that cost \$4,500. The ranch has a skinning rack and walk-in cold box to chill game. Hunters can have game cut and wrapped at a number of places in Bakersfield that Gayer can recommend, or they can bring the chilled meat home to their own butcher.

Currently the "lodge" is a travel trailer with a huge deck built onto the side that serves as an open air cooking, dining, and gathering area with a campfire ring just below. It is not uncommon to see game from the deck, which looks down onto Poso Creek.

Gayer calls his program a "boutique hunting operation," catering to small groups — preferably four or less. When he was hunting on the 800-plus acres of the original ranch, he did this so as to not over burden the wildlife on the property.

Now that he has more acreage to hunt, he is expanding. A new lodge is being built near the current camp, and it will have room to accommodate a few more hunters or bigger groups. Gayer expects the facility to be done in two years.

A few years ago, I tagged along on the junior pig hunt with Gayer, another old friend Lee Hoots, and Hoots' oldest son Logan. It would be the young hunter's first big game animal and the first morning we hunted on foot right out of the main camp along Poso Creek.

Almost immediately we glassed the back of a hog in the creek bed, but we couldn't make out if it was a boar or sow or if there were piglets. Gayer and the two Hoots snuck into the wind right to the edge of the creek. Brush was moving and we could see the back of the one bigger hog, but still couldn't make out its gender. It was pretty clear there were indeed piglets from the noise and glimpses of other moving animals.

The trio edged within 100 feet or so and Logan was set up on shooting sticks while Ron and Lee tried to make out the bigger pigs' gender through binoculars and hope it moved into an opening where a gender determination could be made and a shot taken.

Finally, something spooked the pigs and they bolted down the creek bed. Likely swirling wind gave the hunters away, but it was a great, heart-thundering start for the young hunter. A few moments later, the pigs broke out of the creek bottom a quarter mile below and cut across a pasture. It was indeed a big sow with piglets.

We moved away from the creek to glass some of the higher canyons and ridges, and from a half-mile away we spotted a group of adult pigs moving down a ridge. His familiarity with the ranch gave Gayer a good idea where the pigs were heading so we rushed to the foot of the long ridge and climbed up the hillside to intercept the pigs which were leisurely moving along through the oaks feeding. As we got close to the ridge top, Ron and Logan moved ahead and quickly set up on shooting sticks.

The young hunter made a perfect shot and the pig was down instantly. The long hunting heritage continues at Indian Rock Ranch.



Logan Hoots (left) and Lee Hoots with a young boar taken after an uphill stalk that added a few more beats-per-minute to the young hunter's pounding heart.

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Craig Grilione of Hanford shot this nice boar while hunting with Kika Worldwide on its unique "Cowboy Camp" horseback hunts on the Jack Ranch.

KIKA WORLDWIDE

Unique horseback hunts offered on historic Jack Ranch near Parkfield

Jake Franklin of Kika Worldwide is well-known in the bighorn sheep hunting circles for leading the late Jason Hairston of Kuiu to a world record desert bighorn in California's Orocochia Mountains a few seasons ago.

But there's more to Kika than bighorn sheep. Three years ago, Franklin started what he calls the "Cowboy Camp." It is a three-day horseback hunting experience on the historic Jack Ranch out of Parkfield. Hunters stay in wall tents and eat local range-fed beef and drink local wine while sitting around a campfire each night. During the day, they hunt wild hogs off of horseback.



The Kika Worldwide horseback hunts are reminiscent of elk hunts in the Rocky Mountains or historic African safaris with the hunters staying in a tent camp throughout.

The hunts are run from March through June and are set up for groups of five or six hunters. The hunts cost \$12,500 for up to five hunters, and it's an additional \$2,500 for a sixth hunter. Hunters can shoot as many hogs as they want, but most just harvest one or two boars during the hunt. Franklin said these hunts have been completely booked up for this year and next year because most groups re-book immediately after the experience.

"It's just a pretty cool hunt and pretty special," said Franklin. "We might be doing a few things differently next year to try to accommodate more hunters."

For more information, contact Jake Franklin at 909-702-

0515 or e-mail info@kikaworldwide.com. The website is kikaworldwide.com. Kika Worldwide also has Facebook and Instagram pages.

CAMP FIVE OUTFITTERS

New ownership now running this popular Central Coast operation

Dawson Work took over Camp 5 Outfitters early this year after guiding with the operation for the past six years. Both Camp 5 and Work have a long history of hog hunting on California's Central Coast.

If Dawson Work's name is familiar with hog hunters, it is because his family's 13,000-acre Work Ranch is one of the premier hog hunting ranches in the region — largely because of the 600 to 700 acres of barley grown on the ranch each year. Dawson is a fifth generation Work on the ranch that was established in the 1880s. It was Dawson's grandfather George who first started the ranch's hog hunting program decades ago and began the association with Camp 5 a decade ago.

Doug Roth, who started Camp 5, sold the guiding operation to the 23-year-old Dawson Work this year so Roth could retire. The young Work said his family has vowed to continue to keep the Work Ranch intact, undeveloped, open to guided hunting, while maintaining its farming and ranching tradition.

Work said Camp 5 will also be hunting hogs on a couple of nearby ranches due to deep family friendships and associations, and he expects that Camp 5 will be hunting on about 50,000 acres of Central Coast properties by next year.

The Work Ranch was one the first participants in the Department of Fish and Wildlife's Private Land Management (Continued on Page 8, See Camp 5....)



John Jennings (left) of San Diego bagged these two nice hogs while hunting with Dawson Work, new owner of Camp 5 Outfitters headquartered in San Miguel on the Central Coast. Jennings is a long-time repeat client at Camp 5.

Camp 5....

(Continued from Page 8)

(PLM) program, and Dawson Work said they hope to have a couple of bull tule elk tags in 2023 season through the PLM program. In addition to hunters shooting over 100 wild hogs a year, Camp 5 also offers deer and turkey hunts seasonally. Many hunters opt for combo hunts with these species and hogs. The hunting lodge is currently undergoing a facelift to accommodate more hunters comfortably.

Most hog hunts are two-day events with all food, lodging, field care, and field processings included for \$1,400, but other combination hunt options are available.

Work said this spring's hunting has been particularly good for big hogs with over a dozen weighing in the 250-pound class or better since the beginning of turkey season in late March.

For more information on hunting Camp Five Outfitters in San Miguel, contact Dawson Work at 805-610-5864 or via e-mail at camp5outfitters@att.net. The website is www.camp5outfitters.com.

BIGHORN CANYON RANCH

Doors close on Cherry Valley ranch, but Wagners likely to stay in business

The doors will close permanently on the hunting operation at Bighorn Canyon Ranch in Cherry Valley on June 30 this year. The long-popular destination was run on leased land, and the property recently was sold to a developer to be used as mitigation land for other developments.

The property is slated to be deeded to Riverside County for inclusion into one of its land conservancies to protect open space and wildlife habitat.

The operation was started decades ago by Chuck Wagner and Rob Shelly, giving urban hunters a close-to-home spot where they could pursue wild exotic game released on the ranch property. Hogs, sheep, and goats were the primary game hunters pursued on the property. The operation of the business and hunting program was taken over by Chuck's son Charlie Wagner and his wife Zee 14 years ago.

Zee said they were finishing up the hunts they had scheduled for this year, and all of their facilities would be off the property by the end of the month.

She said they would likely continue in the hunting business and were looking for other properties where hunts for both released animals and wild free-ranging big game could be arranged.

The Wagners will continue operating the website, check e-mails regularly, and continue to answer the phone and update everyone on their mailing and e-mail lists once the pair land in a new hunting home.

Contact information will remain Zee and Charlie Wagner at 951-202-1722 or via e-mail at wagnerhunters@gmail.com. The website will remain bighorncanyonranch.com.

RAAHAUGE'S HOG HUNTING

Hog hunting on historic Rankin Ranch may end because of hog eradications

Raahauge's Hog Hunting may cease its hunting operations on the historic Rankin Ranch because of an ongoing wild hog eradication program on the Nature Conservancy's Frank and Joan Randall Preserve near Tehachapi. The 72,000-acre preserve is adjacent to the Rankin Ranch.

Linc Raahauge said that he has been told 280 wild hogs have been killed so far. He believes the bulk of the hogs have been on the preserve's lower elevations this past few months because it had a better acorn crop than higher elevation lands. This allowed for a significant reduction of area hog numbers.

Raahauge started guiding just five years ago on the Rankin Ranch. He said the hunting was very good until early this year when the hog removal efforts impacted hog numbers.

"All the pigs we took this past year were 200-pound or bigger boars," said Raahauge. "Just those big, tough old boars were all that's left."

Whether or not Raahauge will continue to hunt the Rankin Ranch into the future depends on the success of The Nature Conservancy's hog eradication efforts.

LOCKWOOD HUNTING SERVICES

Tim Lockwood runs one of the most popular Facebook hog hunting pages

Tim Lockwood of Lockwood Hunting Services is one of just two Craig Boddington Endorsed Guides in California, and his hog hunting operation on 5,000 acres just outside of Hopland (40 miles north of Santa Rosa) has about 50 hog hunters per year with near-100 percent success rates.

But Lockwood also runs one of the most popular Facebook hog hunting groups, *California Pig Hunting*, with nearly 10,000 members. He does it as a service to hog hunters in the state.

Lockwood said one of his old guides started the page and put him as an administrator, but then the guide left Lockwood holding the ball when he quit Facebook.

"I kept it to help out new people getting into the sport. Some hunting groups and pages aren't very welcoming to new hunters," said Lockwood. So he's kept administering the page with its wide variety of posts from public land hunters, guides, and guided hunters. It has become one of the best clearing houses on California hog hunting information on social media.

Lockwood believes that giving this information on public land hunting, guide services, and hunting clubs is a great way to help recruit more hunters into the sport.

Here's the direct link to the group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1472408879719404>.

Finding and hunting bedding sites

Most successful pig hunts usually start by locating moving or feeding animals and formulating a plan to get close. This hunting strategy has proven itself for countless hunters in the golden state when wild pigs are on the move. However, what happens when pigs decide to stay bedded during daytime hours?

During the heat of summer or when pigs are heavily pressured spotting them out and moving during the daytime becomes tough to do. If herds become over pressured or daytime temperatures are uncomfortable for them, they will become nocturnal and conduct most of their movement at night. When these conditions are presented, clearly daytime hunting strategies need to change.

Following a frustrating pig hunt about 20 years ago, I decided to start hunting wild pigs differently. On this hunt the midday temperatures were in the triple digits, and it was downright miserable to be out hiking around. With absolutely nothing moving and cooling off in the shade of a huge oak, I realized I was wasting my time. On that day I decided I was going to hunt pigs where they rested; I was going to start sneaking into their beds.

I started reading all I could about what wild pigs look for in a bedding site. Surprisingly, I didn't find a great deal of solid information back then. Through field experience, I realized there was no one answer. I've seen pigs bed in thick cover, under fallen trees, in thorny plants, in remote canyons and in damp creeks. The one common thread throughout was that these locations were usually remote and somewhat protected from predators.

Through my hunting experience and overall field time I started to notice that groups of pigs preferred thick cover and lone boars would pretty much bed down anywhere they didn't feel bothered. To focus on more shot opportunities, I decided to concentrate my new hunting strategy on consistently locating communal bedding areas.

FINDING BEDS

My first objective when locating a pig bed is to search for a nearby water source. Water is very important to wild pigs,



Well used pig beds like this one are easy to spot once you know what conditions wild pigs like for their daily snoozes. The worn trail around and through this dense clump of vegetation indicates both recent and long-time use.

both for drinking and wallowing. If you find a small spring or consistent water area and the right type of cover is in the vicinity, pigs will be around.

Locating these areas is relatively simple. Find a good glassing point and look for small patches of green vegetation. Since water will usually pop to the surface in crags or small valleys, look for green growth in these areas during drier times of the year. From a distance, areas receiving more water than from normal precipitation will be easy to spot.

Once I locate water, I search the surrounding location for heavily brushed areas with thick cover. Unfortunately, you need to find the ugliest, nastiest patch of cover that no sane human would walk through. These are the type of areas where pigs will bed down and feel safe.

Almost all animals are creatures of habit and pigs are no different. If they locate a good bedding area, they will routinely return to it to bed down. These regular beds will usually have well worn trails encircling the cover, an artifact of continued use as pigs look for an easy way into the bed, or to find a spot that isn't already occupied. Pigs will also use the same trails to get to these beds. Identifying trails to the bedding area will also indicate regular use.

Well used pig beds are also absolutely riddled with access (Continued on Page 10, See *Hog beds*....)



The author snuck up on this big boar resting in a small bed in a creek bottom. One shot from the 30-30 lever gun was all that was needed to drop the large pig before it could budge from its daytime bed.

Hog beds....

(Continued from Page 10)

tunnels. The vegetation may be chest high to hunters, but well used pig beds will be a labyrinth of tunnels only two feet high. Find thick cover with a series of pathways throughout, and chances are pigs have used it or are still using it. Frequently, pigs move around when they're bedded. When glassing, look for moving brush, small clouds of dust and anything that tells you something alive is nestled in the vegetation.

Lastly, one of the consistent features I've always found in a well-used pig bed is a dusting area. These are dirt depressions filled with dust or fine silt pigs use to roll in. This fine silt gets through their coarse hair and usually helps them deal with parasites near the skin. On occasion, I've spotted small dust clouds above thick vegetation from a distance, indicating to me that a pig bed is occupied, and the dusting area had just been used.

APPROACHING BEDS

After a little homework and some field time, you've finally located a pig bed. Due to the sometimes-aggressive occupants, you want to approach the bed cautiously and smartly. When I spot a pig bed that I want to get closer to, I carefully examine the terrain and decide on a point of approach. Pigs don't see well, but they aren't blind. I'll stay close to cover when I hike in, and I move slowly. I'll always check the wind religiously and adjust accordingly.

If I'm still unsure if the bed is occupied, I'll close the distance to about 75 to 100 yards and sit downwind and glass the area. Even bedded, pigs move around and are noisy. I once watched a group of eight sows get up, noisily move through the bed, get water and return, raising a dust cloud over the bed that took a few minutes to dissipate. I was thirty yards away and they never knew I was there.

When approaching a bed, always stay downwind. Even the slightest whiff of a human scent and the bed will explode as pigs race to escape. When deep in the thick stuff, adult pigs depend solely on that 12-inch nose to let them know if trouble is near.

If the terrain is uneven and the wind allows, I will always approach a bed from the uphill side. This is simply a safety tactic in case animals decided to leave quickly. Believe me, I've learned that it is far easier and safer to back peddle uphill than it is to roll downhill.

HUNTING BEDS

Getting close to wild animals, especially sturdy pigs with tusks, isn't like kicking up quail. Before I head into a bed, I search all possible hiding spots and make sure I have an escape route in case I need to leave quickly. I'm cautious, careful, and always armed.

As you move through a bed you should move slowly and stay aware. Sometimes, no matter how good the spot looks, it might be empty. Look for fresh scat and prints and be able to tell fresh from not so fresh. Fresh scat surrounding the bed and fresh hoof prints on the well-worn trails in the bed usually means someone is home.

On more than one occasion I've been alerted to pig presence by their smell. They are musty, stinky animals and you may get a whiff of their stink staying downwind on your approach as you get close.

As you move through the bed, keep an eye on the vegetation in front of you. Pigs that are unsure of what's coming will move a bit, disturbing the brush surrounding their tight quarters. If you spot quivering vegetation in front of you, get ready!

If you happen to kick up a sleeping pig, shots will either be quick or on the run. Choose a firearm that you're comfortable with and is suited for tight situations. I usually carry my .357 revolver as a side arm and my 30-30 lever gun as my main weapon. The shorter rifle is easier to swing for me in tight places and has proven to be the perfect firearm for this type of hunting.

And finally, if you're going to sneak into their beds, be prepared to get close to sleeping pigs. Staying quiet and downwind may keep your stalk undetected by snoring animals. During a stealthy stalk through a pig bed several years ago, I was a little surprised to see that I had snuck right up to a sleeping pig laying right next to the trail in the deep brush. He was dispatched a short 18-inches off the tip of my barrel.

When I head out on a pig hunt, I completely understand that success will not be easy. I expect to do quite a bit of hiking on each hunt, and I rarely give up. Clearly, the ideal situation for hunting wild pigs is spotting them out feeding or on the move. However, when conditions change and they start becoming nocturnal, try hunting where others don't and sneak into their beds.

I guarantee it will be one of the most exciting hunts you'll ever go on.

— Tim Hovey

Stalking wild boars: Wind is critical

The stalking part of spot-and-stalk hunting is the most exciting part of pursuing wild hogs.

After glassing a group of hogs from a half-mile away, a buddy and I once moved across an open barley field to within easy rifle range of that group of wild pigs.

The wild hogs popped their heads up and looked in our direction several times, but each time we froze and didn't move until they went back to feeding.

While wild hogs share a lot of the same genetics with humans, their eyesight has much less acuity, or the ability to define detail. By moving only when all of the hogs had their heads down feeding, we were just blurry rocks or trees and able to creep to within easy rifle range.

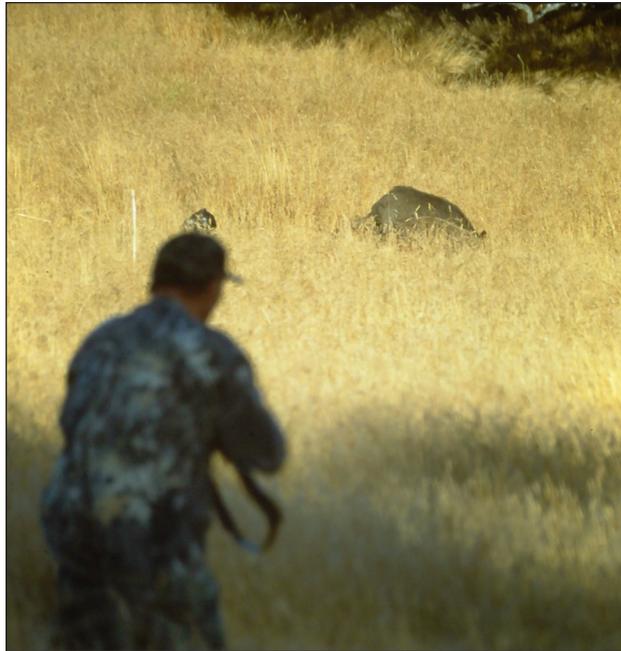
As with most wildlife that has to worry about predators, hogs do discern movement very well, even with their poor acuity. This is partially why they run in groups. The odds are pretty good an animal in the sounder will catch movement of a predator while they feed and move along. An unmoving lump in their vision might be far less likely to spook them.

Binocular vision allows the brain to estimate distance to an object and discern movement better. Our field of vision is about 80 degrees in front of us, most of that binocular vision. A hog's field of vision is over 300 degrees because its eyes are set on the side of the head. But its binocular vision is only about 50 degrees directly in front of it.

In our stalk, the pigs mostly did not turn their heads or body to look at us directly. They looked toward us with just a single eye facing us. A couple of times, they did turn and fix our position with both eyes. They stared at us a lot longer those times. Once they saw no more movement, it calmed them and they went back to feeding.

Often in a stalk, if the pig faces you or fixes its vision on you with both eyes, it is a danger sign that they know something is up and could spook at any second. The only option is to not move and hope they calm back down.

This is not the time to throw up the rifle and take an unplanned shot. They will be on the run before you can find them in the scope and fire. You will have the opportunity to shoot at running game if do they decide to bolt. You don't need to assure you have to take that running shot by spooking the game because you moved and confirmed their suspicions. It could result in no shot opportunity at all.



Stalking hogs this close is not difficult if you understand the hog's senses of sight, hearing, and smell. Smell is the most important.

All this means that a careful hunter can stalk very close to wild hogs if vision is the only concern. The hog's ability to hear and smell are the two spoilers of most stalks.

Hogs have very good hearing and a noise that is out of the ordinary alerts them to predators. They might be accustomed to hearing squirrels moving through oak leaves, but metallic noises and breaking of branches can panic them into a ground-eating run. Always try to be as quiet as possible, but don't panic if a leaf crackles or a small twig snaps. If you are out of sight of the hogs when you make some slight noise, just wait quietly for a minute before continuing.

Hogs' amazing ability to smell is the downfall to most at-

tempts to stalk a pig.

Paying attention to the wind at all times during a stalk is essential. I can't tell you how many times a crisp wind blowing into my face on a ridge or in a canyon turned into a swirling eddy blowing in the opposite direction en route to a pig from what *was* the downwind position.

A bowhunting buddy carried around an old, well-cleaned Elmer's glue container filled with baby powder. He'd take the cap off and send out a small puff of powder with a squeeze. It was a great wind gauge. I have one of those in my hog hunting gear to this day.

But hogs do more than smell your scent on the breeze. Two of us once watched a group of pigs cross a canyon well below us and start working up a worn trail on our side of the canyon. We ran up the ridge toward the saddle where the pigs would cross over the ridge and into the next canyon. The hillside was covered in oaks and brush, but we knew the saddle was more open and would provide a shot opportunity. We were well ahead of the pigs and dropped down, crossed the trail they were on well below us and continued up the opposite side of the canyon to the saddle where we knew we'd have a shot and we could better see onto the hillside.

We could see the pigs moving along the trail from time to time, sure we were going to get a shot. Then they came to the spot where we'd crossed the trail 15 minutes before. It took all of about a second for the lead pig to panic and pork was running in all directions. They had smelled where we had just crossed in front of them and we blew our opportunity. It was a hard lesson learned.

— **Jim Matthews**

California's first *Russian* boars were German

While we call them Russian boars, that might be a misnomer. The first truly wild hogs in California were from German wild hog stock.

It was George Gordon Moore, a financial guru, and Cotton McGuire, owner of a hunting club with imported German wild hogs in North Carolina, who were responsible for the first release of pure-strain wild boar into California. In 1924, Moore wrote McGuire and requested that he capture several wild boar from around the Hooper Bald preserve and ship them to California, where he had purchased property. McGuire trapped 12 wild hogs — three males and nine females — and shipped them west. In 1925 Moore released them onto the San Francisquito Ranch, located along San Jose Creek between Carmel and the Los Padres National Forest in Monterey County. Soon thereafter a neighbor, Stuyvesant Fish, procured some wild boar from Moore's herd and released them onto his own property. From these two herds the hogs spread south into the Santa Lucia Mountains.

Prior to this time there were small, scattered herds of feral hogs roaming the foothills of the western Sierra Nevada and along the various coastal mountain ranges, remnants of the time when early settlers had released their domestic swine to roam and forage freely. These domestic swine — though very adaptable — lacked the genetic make-up to survive harsh weather changes of minor outbreaks of disease. When the wild boar of Moore and Fish's releases met up with them, they interbred, producing a hardy offspring capable of adapting and thriving in a wider range of weather, to fight off disease, and survive on a wider range of forage. They also became harder to hunt.

In 1932, 24 yearling wild boar from the San Francisquito Ranch were transplanted to the Carmel watershed in Monterey County on public land in the Los Padres National Forest. These animals established a strong foothold and began to expand their range. They moved south to the Arroyo Seco River area, and this became the southernmost boundary of their range. By the beginning of World War II, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service estimated that there were approximately 350 wild boar on state, federal, and private land in the state. By 1948 U.S. Forest Service documents showed an estimated 150 animals living on Los Padres National Forest lands, increasing to an estimated 600 by 1956. In the meantime, publishing magnate William Randolph Hearst wrote George Gordon Moore and said that wild boar had reached his San Simeon estate by 1952.

In the late 1950's, both private individuals and state agencies began stocking live-trapped wild boar in other parts of the state. The state department of fish and game live-trapped 25 wild boar at Big Sur State Park because they were beginning to root the place up, releasing them further south, at Nacimiento Summit in Monterey County. Harold Eade, who owned the Hepsadam Ranch in San Benito County, bought some wild hogs from a Monterey County ranch and released



Most wild hogs along California's Central Coast have at least some genes from pure-strain "German" wild boars released a century ago.

them around 1961. At the same time, two wild hogs were reportedly introduced near Willits, in Mendocino County.

In the mid-1960s, wild boar hunting began to become more and more popular in California, though the number of sportsmen participating is undocumented and the total wild (feral) pig population is likewise unknown. This led to more live trappings and releases of hogs by individuals acting on their own, without governmental approval or cooperation, further assisting the hogs in expanding their range. Sometime during the 1960s, three wild hogs were released into the Whiskey Creek section of western Shasta County. In 1968, William Keeler, owner of the Dye Creek Ranch, began breeding captured feral hogs with some European-type wild boar from Monterey County. By 1970 20 feral sows had been bred and released on the ranch, where the population grew to an estimated 1,200 pigs by 1974. And in the spring of 1970, a handful of Monterey County wild boar were transplanted to the King's River area of Fresno County.

Along the way, wild hogs were transplanted and took hold in many diverse areas of the state. They could be found to the south in Santa Barbara County, on many of the Channel Islands, the Humboldt County coast in northwestern California, the lava beds of Lassen County near the foot of Mount Lassen, and near the northern rim of the vast San Joaquin Valley. Sightings were also reported near the Oregon border, in Siskiyou County, and along the Colorado River in the desert region of southeastern California.

Since the 1980's California's wild hog population has continued to expand its range. The statewide population has experienced fluctuations in overall numbers during this time, mainly due to drought, but the overall trend has generally been upward. By the early 1980's wild hogs had begun to challenge deer — which were experiencing population declines — as the most-harvested big game animal in the state. That trend continues today.

— Bob Robb



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California Hog Hunter index of wild hog hunting guides statewide

The following is a listing of guides and outfitters in California running hog hunts on private land. It is here as a convenience for *California Hog Hunter* readers. Hunters, guides, and outfitters are encouraged to provide us with information on operations not listed here so we can make this listing as complete as possible. The listing is alphabetical by operation, guide, or ranch.

Adventures West Recreation, P.O. Box 2675, Paso Robles, CA 93446. Contact: Keith Hartman at 805-674-1623. E-mail: keith@adventureswestrecreation.com. Website: <http://www.adventureswestrecreation.com/>.

All Season Outfitters, 9670 Martin Lane, Prunedale, CA 93907. Contact: Tony Phelps at 831-214-7073. E-mail: pig-huntcalifornia@gmail.com. Website: <https://www.pig-hunt.com/>.

B&B Outfitting and Guide Service, 1739 Crystal Ct., Los Banos, CA 93635. Contact: Bill Marchese. Telephones: 209-827-6193 office; 209-704-1011 mobile. E-Mail address: winchesterandbnm@att.net.

Big Horn Canyon Ranch, Moreno Valley, CA. Booking: 1-951-202-1722. E-mail: wagnerhunters@gmail.com. Website: <http://bighorncanyonranch.com/>.

Bitterwater Outfitters, P.O. Box 51, San Miguel, CA 93451. Contact: Clayton Grant at 805-610-4521. E-mail: hunt@bitterwateroutfitters.com. Websites: <https://www.bitterwateroutfitters.com/> and the California Hog Hunts website at <http://californiahoghunt.com/>.

Bucks Boars and Birds Hunting. Contact: Todd Renz at 831-750-5027. E-mail: todd@bucksboarsandbirds.com. Website: <https://bucksboarsandbirds.com/>.

Camp Five Outfitters, 77502 Hog Canyon Rd., San Miguel, CA 93451. Contact: Dawson Work at 805-610-5864. E-mail: camp5outfitters@att.net. Website: <https://www.camp5outfitters.com/>.

Central Coast Outfitters, P.O. Box 6896, Santa Maria, CA 93456. Contact: Alfred Luis at 805-260-5991. E-mail: aluis@centralcoastoutfitters.com. Website: <https://centralcoastoutfitters.com/>.

Dash Ranch. Contact: Dave Morrow at 530-941-2112. E-Mail: dashranch@frontier.com. Website: <http://www.northerncaliforniahunting.com/>.

Giant Sequoia Guide Service. Contact: 559-359-6166. E-mail: giantsequoiags@gmail.com.

Hog Canyon Hunts, Paso Robles, CA. Contact: Tim Testerman: 805-550-3584. E-mail: hogcanyonhunts1@gmail.com. Website: <https://www.hogcanyonhunts.com/>

Hogs Wild (South Fork Ranch), P.O. Box 355, Coalinga, CA 93210. Contact: Rifle guide, Jeremy Fairbanks at 559-707-9159. Archery guide, Larry Greve at 559-935-5788 or mobile 559-269-0564. Website: <https://hogswild.com/>.

Hoss Hog Guides & Outfitters, Willows, CA. Contact: Mike Gardner at 916-606-4558. E-mail: hosshogadventures@yahoo.com. Website: <https://www.hosshogadventures.com/>.

Indian Rock Ranch, Glennville, CA. Contact: Ron Gayer. E-Mail: elkron98@gmail.com. Website: [\[guidetohunting.com/\]\(http://guidetohunting.com/\).](https://theguides-</p>
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Kika Worldwide, Cholome, CA. Contact: Jake Franklin at 909-702-0515. E-mail: info@kikaworldwide.com. Website: <http://kikaworldwide.com/>.

Lockwood Hunting Services, P.O. Box 833 Ukiah, CA 95482. Contact Tim Lockwood at 707-888-2859. E-mail: tim@lockwoodhuntingservices.com. Website: <https://www.lockwoodhuntingservices.com/>.

Nessen Schmidt Guide Service, 105 Oasis Rd., King City, CA 93930. Contact: Nessen Schmidt at 831-385-1335. Website: <http://nessenschmidtguideservice.com/>.

Oakstone Outfitters, P.O. Box 171, Bradley, CA 93426. Contact: Chad Wiebe at 805-622-9485 or 805-622-9485. E-mail: info@oakstoneoutfitters.com. Website: <https://oakstoneoutfitters.com/>.

Jim Palm, Parkfield, CA. Contact: Jim Palm at 805-235-4080. E-mail: cjpawn10@yahoo.com.

Pastori Guide Service, Eureka. Contact: Rick Pastori at 707-599-7384 (cell). E-mail: pastori@humboldt1.com.

Raahauge's Hog Hunting (Rankin Ranch), Corona, CA. Contacts: Lincoln and Britta Raahauge at 951-334-1018. E-Mail: raahaugeshog hunting@gmail.com.

Rumpus Hunts, P.O. Box 26330, Fresno, CA 93729. Contact phone: 559-707-3225. E-mail: rumpushunts@gmail.com. Website: <https://rumpushunts.com/>.

Red Bank Ale & Quail Outfitters, P.O. Box 8295, Red Bluff, CA 96080. Contact phone: 530-529-9435. E-mail: Hunting@RedBankOutfitters.com. Website: <https://redbank-hunting.com/>.

Roth Hunting, P.O. Box 26, Lockwood, CA 93932. Contact: Ed Roth at 831-385-0978 (office) or 831-320-7790 (cell). E-mail: edrothhunt@gmail.com. Website: <http://rothhunting.com/>.

Sacramento River Guide. Contact: Kirk Portocarrero at 800-670-4449 or 530-515-5951. Website: <https://www.sac-riverguide.com/>.

SC2 Outdoors, 18825 Country Hills Dr., Cottonwood, CA 96022. Contacts: Shawn and Shelly Chitten at 530-999-8003. E-mail: shawn@sc2outdoors.com. Website: <https://www.sc2outdoors.com/>.

Skyrose Ranch Hunting, 69430 Deer Valley Ranch Rd., San Miguel, CA 93451. Contact: Jared Christensen at 805-434-8641. E-mail: jared@skyroseranch.com,

Tejon Ranch, P.O. Box 1000, Tejon Ranch, CA 93243. Contact Mike Campo at 661-663-4210. E-mail: huntinfo@tejonranch.com. Website: <http://hunt.tejonranch.com/>.

Twisselman Ranch, 7645 Cattle Dr., Santa Margarita, CA. Contact Joel Twisselman at 805-459-0782. E-mail: jctwisselman@aol.com. Website: <https://www.twisselmanranch.com/>.

2M Hunting, Paso Robles, CA. Contact: Matt Murry at 831-601-5228. Website: <https://2mhunting.com/>.

Western Wildlife Adventures, 236-A W. East Ave Ste No 349, Chico, CA 95926. Contact Chris Hall: 530-894-1400. E-mail: chris@wildlifeadv.com. Website: <http://www.wildlifeadv.com/>.

Wild Pig Hunting Guide Service, Cloverdale, CA. Contacts: Steven and Sage Taylor at 707-894-7794 or 707-321-0953. E-mail: wildpighunting@comcast.net. Website: <https://www.wildpighuntingguideservice.com/>.

Doing your own European skull mounts

You've killed a nice boar and now it's time to show it off – permanently. You're getting a shoulder mount done by a reliable taxidermist, but you still have the complete skull. You can pay someone to use dermestid beetles, which work great, but it'll cost you around two-hundred dollars (or more). The following is a step-by-step tutorial for a do-it-yourself, professional looking European skull mount using warm water maceration.

STEP 1: Remove as much as the flesh, including eyes and brain, from the skull. I use a Havalon knife, but any sharp knife will work. A wire hanger will work for stirring up the brain and flushing it out.

STEP 2: Once most of the flesh has been removed, place skull in a bucket, with a lid, filled with warm water. The idea here is to keep the water warm, thus promoting bacterial growth which will loosen the remaining flesh. If the weather is warm enough, you're good to go. If it's cold out, you'll need a small aquarium heater to keep the water warm – you can also insulate the bucket with any material suitable for the task. Some will remove the skull from the bucket and use a pressure sprayer to get rid of any remaining flesh – if you choose this route (which I don't), be very careful not to lose any loose teeth.

STEP 3: Keep the bucket outside, but protected from varmints with the lid on it. This part will be very, very smelly – and I do mean smelly, it's basically a bucket of rotting flesh in water.

STEP 4: Eventually all the flesh will drop off or float to the surface of the water, and you'll be left with a skull. Typically, teeth will fall out (including the canines), but not always. Be careful when draining the gross, stinky water – I use a strainer that my wife won't take back. I'll collect any teeth and put them in a labeled cup with baking soda, in an attempt to mitigate the smell. Also, frequently the lower jaw (mandible) will spilt in half between the incisors, but not to worry, you can glue them back together with common white glue after bleaching.

STEP 5 (LONGEST): Once your skull is flesh-free, it's time to degrease. Hogs and bears have the greasiest biology, so they take the longest to degrease. If you get impatient, or cut short this step, your skull will eventually discolor (yellowish) over time. A general rule of thumb is to keep degreasing when you think you're finally done — figure nine to 12



A wild boar makes an impressive skull mount. The process is simple, but it involves NOT doing a lot of things you hear suggested all the time.

months. There are a few different ways to degrease, but they all involve solvents and warm water. Use a clean bucket with warm water (I like 120 degrees) and your chosen solvent, the most popular being Dawn liquid detergent. Other solvents are white gas, ammonia, and acetone. For the first week, change the water every day. If you look closely, you can actually see grease on the surface of the water. After a week, or so, you can change the water weekly. Keep adding your solvent to the water and try to keep the water warm. I usually change solvents as time passes, sometimes alternating between Dawn, ammonia, and acetone.

STEP 6: Once you're confident that all grease has been leached out of the skull, it's time to bleach (whiten) it. Remember, you're not actually using bleach, which will damage a skull, what you'll want to use is a peroxide crème developer found in beauty salons, or online. The one I use is 40 volume, which is 12 percent peroxide – it comes in liquid or crème. The crème is easier to use, as the liquid tends to run off the

skull making the process ineffective. You want the developer to stay in contact with the skull while a heat source (the sun works) activates the peroxide. A cotton ball or make-up removal pad, soaked in crème developer will work great. Best to use gloves and safety glasses during this process because the crème developer will turn your skin a whiter shade, and burn while it's in contact with your skin.

STEP 7: Once your skull has been whitened, it's time to piece it back together. If the lower jaw split, just use basic white glue (Elmer's) and a rubber band, or two, to hold it in place. When white glue dries, it's clear, and in case of a mistake, some warm water will eventually loosen white glue's grip. I like to temporarily place all the teeth, including the canines, in the jaws, just to make sure they all fit properly – then remove them and use white glue to place them permanently.

STEP 8: As a final step, one option is to seal your skull. You can do this by making a 50-50 mix of water and white glue, then simply apply with a paint brush. Another option is to use Krylon clear acrylic spray in matte, gloss, or semi-gloss (your choice).

FINAL NOTES: Never boil a skull. Never use bleach. Never use a metal container with solvents. Acetone should not be used if your water is heated, it's flammable.

— Gary Berz

What is the perfect California hog rifle?

Let's just start the argument right here: What is the perfect hog hunting rifle for California? I can hear your wheels turning, juices boiling; favorites, biases and dislikes floating to the tip of your tongue. Nothing stirs up after-dinner hunting discussions more than when someone claims their pet *whatever* is the best type or rifle and cartridge for *pick-a-game* species.

The best California hog rifle/cartridge discussion is one I have participated in around campfires and in hunting camps all over the state. Recently, Andy McCormick of Legacy Sports and I were discussing the concept. He was thinking of — perhaps — offering a special Howa rifle built up as a California Hog Special.

After our conversation, I started seriously considering the question by defining the criteria the so-called perfect gun would have face.

— Public land hunting usually consists of making long treks, often with a backpack and gear for overnight stays. Weight is an issue here. No one wants to carry a 10-pound rifle, when an eight-pounder will do the same task. And what if it weighed six pounds complete with scope? Weight can also be a consideration when you are stalking game across a canyon after spotting hogs from a ridge or two over — even if you're not backpacking.

— Shots can be long, stretching across oak-studded hillsides and vast expanses of rangeland. While pigs are very stalkable, there are times when long shots are necessary, especially at dawn or dusk or before pigs disappear into heavy brush. Trajectory is an issue here and being able to place shots at greater distance also makes scope choice an issue.

— Shots can be short in heavy thickets of chaparral, coastal scrub sage, or scrub oak and manzanita. Guns that handle well and have stopping power are what is needed in this situation. Since even well-hit pigs often don't leave much of a blood trail, putting the hog down quickly — if not instantly — is a strong consideration.

— A lot of hog hunting is what I call "bail and blaze hunting," especially on private lands on the Central



Jim Matthews shot this nice wild hog on the Tejon Ranch hunting with the late Darrell Francis many seasons ago. The rifle-cartridge combination was a Howa Model 1500 in .338 Winchester Magnum with a Bushnell Elite scope. The shot was made at around 200 yards and the pig was dead at the shot. Is this the perfect rifle for hunting wild hogs in California?

Coast. We rumble around on ranch roads, and suddenly there is a big boar running across the road in front of us. The gun that handles easily and *safely* in truck cabs and loads quickly can be a consideration. The pig could be gone if rifle and shooter can't slip out of a cab with speed, chamber a round, and get into a steady shooting position quickly.

— Repeat shots are often needed. Wild pigs, especially old boars, are tough critters. I have often said

that if you think of an animal the size of an elk and compress it into a 200 to 250-pound animal, you have a pig. Big bones, thick hide, and dense meat describe a hog. Most guides recommend shooting as long as the pig is still on its feet.

— Then there is the whole cartridge and bullet discussion within these other criteria. One certainty: good penetration is mandatory. You have to punch vitals so death is humane and recovery assured.

It's a fun discussion and mental exercise for us individually. To some extent, we go through this before each hunt when deciding which of our rifles and loads to take with us on a hunt. I've been lucky to shoot a pile of hogs through the years, and I've hunted them all over the state in a variety of habitats. My pigs have been shot with 18 different cartridges from small rounds primarily designed for varmints up 45 caliber rounds. I even used a slug in a shotgun one time. I've used single shots, lots of bolt guns, semi-autos, and lever guns. Do I have a favorite? Is one of the guns I've used ideal?

How about you?

If someone said you could only have one firearm for the rest of your hog hunting years, what would it be? What rifle, cartridge, scope, and load? It can be something custom you've been dreaming about making up. It can be a factory rifle you've always wanted to own. Or it can be an old favorite, something that has been passed down for three generations. Drop us an e-mail (odwriter@verizon.net) and let us know. We'll share some of the answers in the next issue or two.

— **Jim Matthews**