

California Hog Hunter

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Finding Hogzilla: A tale of bagging a public land trophy

By GARY BERZ

For California Hog Hunter

He was back. My giant hog — my mythical unicorn — was still in the area where I first encountered him. How did I get here?

Hunting wild hogs on public land in Southern California is about the toughest hunt you can imagine. The time, the effort, the expense, all adds up to — well, it adds up to hiring a guide or an outfitter. That's what most California hog hunters do — and who can blame them?

But, if you're so inclined, there is another way. I call it "the hard way," but most hunters call it, "do-it-yourself" or DIY. Whatever you want to call it, with today's resources, you can make a near-impossible endeavor possible.

Let's start with what we all know — wild hogs need food, water, and cover. The problem in Southern California is finding all three and finding them on public land where hunting is legal. This is where today's resources come in handy.

First up is Internet forums and social media. Both can be helpful but the information is more often sketchy and unreliable. Hunters would rather give up their first-born child than disclose the location of a sounder of wild hogs, especially on public land. But total newcomers can find gems of information to give them a starting point.

Second, Big Game Hunting Maps has two wild pig hunting



Gary Berz of Corona with the giant wild hog he took while hunting a remote chunk of the Cleveland National Forest with his Mathews bow.

map packets that give maps and very specific information on public land hunting areas.

Third, using Google Earth can be productive if only to find the general areas that have the characteristics conducive to holding wild pigs. Once you've located several promising areas, you have to ask if they are public land and are they legal to hunt.

Fourth, enter the onX maps app. Most hunters are familiar with the multi-feature GPS application for your phone that will show you everything from private and public

land boundaries, to access points, trail networks and owner contact information. I've used onX on hunts for California hogs and bears and Kansas whitetails. It's an invaluable tool.

Fifth, my last go-to in my scouting tool kit is the tried and true trail camera. While not a new revelation, they are definitely under-used by hog hunters. Multiple trail cameras are vital for finding and patterning wild hogs. If you're not using them, you're not hunting efficiently and you will be hard-pressed to fill a pig tag.

Once you have found a place to start scouting and spent time setting out trail cameras in an area, you are now to the point where it's just a matter of motivation and effort to bag hog. I had all these things going for me on my latest quest for (Continued on Page 4, See *Hogzilla*....)

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We're back: You can thank Hollis & Higley

Right up until the day he died, Durwood Hollis was urging me to restart *California Hog Hunter*.

"Our seminars are jammed with guys desperate to get information on where and how to hunt hogs," said Durwood at lunch that day, ostensibly to celebrate his 80th birthday a few weeks earlier. We ate on an open-air patio because of the Coronavirus pandemic.

"We need to start it again," he said.

Durwood had been the instigator for starting the printed version of this newsletter back in 1998, and we put it out for eight years before the financial reality of a print and mail publication finally forced me to close the doors in 2007.

It was only three or four years after I'd closed up shop that Durwood started pounding the drum again about how he felt the time was right for a digital return of the newsletter. He knew the readership base was there for a California publication on wild hog hunting.

John Higley was nearly as much a fixture in the pages of the newsletter as Hollis, and always a believer in the sense of having this publication. Just a month before John passed away in 2020 (and just 2 1/2 months after Durwood), we were talking on the phone. At 83, John was working full-time in his landscaping business, putting in at least 40 hours a week. He was also still writing

in the evenings, cranking out from two to six magazine stories a month. I had told him not long after Durwood's death that I was thinking about a practical way to bring the newsletter back digitally, just as Durwood had suggested. John asked me if I was ready for him to send me a story that he'd been mulling over on hunting wild hogs. He said he knew the newsletter would return.

"I'll need that story soon," I told John, "Soon."

Soon didn't come soon enough for Durwood and John to see the restart of the newsletter or write some fresh copy for this issue. You will see copies of their stories — previously written stories — in future issues of *California Hog Hunter*. Their expertise is as relevant today as when it was first shared.

Thanks to a friends at Turner's Outdoorsman, Legacy Sports Interational, and Hornady, this newsletter is back in this new all digital format. Best of all it's free. Details on how to "subscribe" via e-mail to make sure you are notified when a new quarterly issue is published can be found elsewhere in this issue.

Best of all, I suspect *California Hog Hunter* will be here long after I join my old writing friends in those endless oak woodlands.

About Us

California Hog Hunter is published four times per year with digital issues coming out each quarter. The publication is wholly sponsored by the Turner's Outdoorsman chain of shooting, hunting and fishing stores across California and Arizona, Legacy Sports International, importers of Howa, Pointers, Citadel firearm brands, and Nikko-Sterling optics, and Hornady, makers of ammunition and reloading supplies and equipment.

California Hog Hunter is dedicated to bringing you information on where the hunting is best for 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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The current digital issue and all backissues are available at the following websites: Turner's Outdoorsman at www.turners.com, Legacy Sports at www.legacysports.com, and the new *California Hog Hunter* website at www.CaliforniaHogHunter.com. All issues are free to download and share.

Note to Readers: Readers are encouraged to send letters, stories, and digital photos on their hunts to *California Hog Hunter* at odwriter@verizon.net. Think of this as your publication.

Hogzilla....

(Continued from Page 1)

a wild public land hog. It was a place I had already whacked a couple of pigs in the past. It took a few trips, but eventually the trail cameras revealed a legitimate hogzilla. My unicorn was real.



Wild hogs are notorious for not leaving much of a blood trail, but this big hog spilled plenty after a good hit with a 125-grain Slick Trick Magnum broadhead.

After the initial euphoria that comes with a SD card jackpot, it was time to make a plan. I hunt exclusively with a bow, so my plan had to include close proximity and the ability to stalk with the wind in my face. Knowing that a mature boar this big would never tolerate human presence, my plan had to be precise and efficient, or risk never seeing this monster again. Pigs on public land are not usually found in an easily accessible location, and this spot was no exception. It was a hell hike.

Now it was time to fall back on some of the basic tools. After studying Google Earth for hours on end, I noticed a small plateau-like feature located not far from the boar's tracks and one of my cameras. If the wind was right, I might be able to sneak in, slightly above the boar and hope that he would make a mistake and present a downward angle shot.

My first attempt ended surprisingly quick. After the long, arduous hike in, about two-hundred yards from my destination, I stopped to glass the area so as not to spook my unicorn. The uneven terrain and thick vegetation made glassing almost useless. I proceeded with caution. About a hundred yards from the plateau-like feature I heard a loud, strange, eerie sound that stopped me in my tracks. It was a growl only a beast, like my quarry, could make, and it was loud. I took out my bins and at fifty yards I could see the tops of bushes moving like it was super windy. It was calm. Yet, this beast had winded me at over fifty yards and he was pissed. The element of surprise was gone. Not wanting this boar to relocate to another zip code, and without a back-up plan, retreating seemed like the only viable option.

Back at the homestead, Plan B took shape. To be able to pull this off, I was going to need some intervention from the

hunting Gods and a fair amount of luck. I'd have to tackle the hell-hike from another direction, hope the wind was right, get into the proper position at the mini-plateau and then pray the monster boar was still there and would move into a shooting lane while I was there. That's a lot of uncertainty and a lot of work. But this was a once-in-a-lifetime hog so I was prepared to hunt both the early morning and the evening hours.

With boots on the ground well before sunrise, I ventured into the forest with guarded optimism mixed in with the natural uncertainty of a challenging hunt.

Except for the pucker factor of nearly walking straight into a buzzworm in the dark, the hike in was uneventful. After a couple of hours, I quietly found my mini-plateau, and settled in for a long sit. Glorious in all its grandeur, the sunrise reminded me why we do this. Punching a tag is always the goal, but being outside and enjoying nature while trying to outsmart a tough old hog is priceless. My quiet reflective moment came to an abrupt end when my senses picked up the unmistakable sound of a branch cracking. If wild hogs are anything, they're noisy. Not too many animals in the wild are heavy enough to snap a downed tree branch. All my senses went into high-alert mode, hoping for another crack of a branch, rustle of leaves, snort, squeal, or grunt — anything! My unicorn did not disappoint, and over the internal sound of my heart pounding, another

(Continued on Page 5, See *Hogzilla....*)



Getting the all the Unicorn's meat and skull out required two grueling trips for four hunters in rugged terrain. Welcome to public land hog hunting.

Hogzilla....

(Continued from Page 4)
branch broke, and then another.

With the breeze in my face I watched the bushes below me move like the underbrush was alive. There was a critter down there, and it almost assuredly was a hog. Whether it was my unicorn didn't matter. I had an arrow nocked, and I was ready to come to full draw. There were a few small shooting lanes and areas where I could see a pig clearly. It was a waiting game.

I had ranged the open areas from 26 to 35 yards, and I was hoping the wind didn't change directions. Finally, my wait was over and I watched with amazement as the monster boar hog slipped into view. With my adrenaline pumping, the string moved like butter to full draw — a moment in time that all bowhunters would understand. That is the instant right before the highest of highs or the lowest of lows. This is the point when you try to keep calm and try not to obsess about hog size or his cutters. In spite of the adrenaline and pounding heart, I tried to focus on my breathing and form and hoped for a quartering away or broadside shot. Then he moved in view and the arrow was on its way. A strong, deep grunt followed as the beast plowed through the thicket. The hog's retreat was not graceful or elegant, but a final act of sheer power and determination to survive, but it was the beginning of the end for this behemoth.

You never really know if your shot was true. You can be confident, but I still sat back and began the bowhunters torment of replaying the shot in my mind over and over again. Confidence is not confirmation, and I was in no hurry to blood trail in thick brush. I waited for a solid two hours before I began to look for blood. At first there was nothing as I slowly followed the erratic tracks and broken foliage. Finally I came across some blood, a lot of blood. After another 50 yards, I saw what looked like something out of one of my son's dinosaur books in a chapter about woolly mammoths. This ginormous boar definitely didn't suffer from ground shrinkage. It was a once-in-a-lifetime wild hog — and on public land to boot.

After the initial shock began to wear off, and I was finished congratulating myself, the magnitude of the task in front of me began to sink in. How the heck was I going to get this beast back to my truck? The head alone was so heavy, it was all I could do to just lift it. You may notice the position of the hog in the picture isn't the best for showing off, but the body was too heavy to roll over by myself.

Massive boar hogs may not have a great reputation as delectable table fare. Nevertheless, this seasoned warrior deserved the respect and ethical consideration as any other game animal, so I did the responsible thing: I took out my cell phone (hoping I had cell coverage) and called my closest hunting partners for help. Swearing secrecy, three of my buddies showed up at a moment's notice. Two of them drove over two hours to meet me at a desolate dirt road.

What I lacked in good sense, I made up for in preparation. Between my backpack and my truck, we had everything that we needed: rope, come-along, game cart, meat hauler, kill kit, and more. With the uneven terrain the game cart was pretty much useless, but there was a stretch or two where it came in handy. The meat haulers (one of my partners brought one also), proved to be priceless. All in all, it took four men two trips and just over five hours to get the boar back to my truck.

Having a successful hog hunt, on public land, in Southern California is one of the most rewarding hunts an outdoorsman can pursue, and there is always the possibility your unicorn is real and will end up as a legit wall hanger. No doubt, this type of hunting will be tough, but it is possible. Use all the tools you can, but in the end, it'll be determination and perseverance that will lead you to your unicorn. Get off the couch and make it happen.



BIG GAME HUNTING MAPS

These maps books are essential for finding public land hunting spots

One of the best investments a new public land hog hunter can make is to pick up copies of Big Game Hunting Maps booklets of maps. There are editions for Northern California and for Central and Southern California.

Erwin Ward has mapped the best public land wild hog hunting areas in the state and combined them into these two packages. Each area has a color copy of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) map showing public land ownership with the top areas for wild hogs outlined on the maps. Ward then reproduces 7 1/2-minute topographic map details of each of the areas for more detailed study.

The photo above shows a sample of one page of a BLM map in the booklet.

Each edition is just under \$40 and can be ordered online off the website at www.biggamehuntingmaps.com, or by mail from Big Game Hunting Maps, 6288 Marlborough Drive, Goleta, CA 93117, or by simply calling 805-967-4482.

Shot Placement is a critical skill

To say that wild pigs are hard to kill usually understates the actual fact of the matter. Outside of a bullet to the brain, a mature boar is extremely difficult to kill with a single shot. A seasoned hog hunter once told me that he “shoots until the hog has four feet in the air.” The past four decades of my involvement in this sport have certainly given validity to that statement.

A wild pig is put together more like an elk than a deer. That is to say, hogs have stout bone and heavy joints. This fact, coupled with a tough hide and a cartilaginous shield (think of a 1/4-inch Teflon plate) beneath the skin that overlays the neck and chest areas, places real demand on bullet performance adequacy.

On more than one occasion, I’ve seen bullets breakup before they reached the intended vital organs. And broken bones will not slow up a big boar when his adrenaline is pumping.

Furthermore, a wounded wild pig may not put down much blood sign. Pig hair and fat is quite absorbent. Even with a through-and-through bullet wound, blood that seeps to the outside may be soaked up by the hair and fat, leaving little to follow. In addition, some of the absorbent body fat can be dislodged by the bullet and plug up both the entry and the exit wound. So don’t count on much of a blood trail.

Chest shots: Unless you use a large caliber rifle and heavy bullets, a mature boar shot anywhere in the chest cavity will run. While this shot will puncture heart and/or lungs and is likely to result in the pig’s quick demise, the animal can cover lots of ground in a big hurry before it dies. Mix in heavy cover and fading daylight and you might not ever find the hog.

To overcome this problem, most experienced pig hunters favor heavy-for-caliber bullets. The heaviest bullets generally offer both better penetration and more impact energy assuring a quicker death. While you can find success with smaller calibers and lighter bullets, those occurrences are generally the exception, rather than the rule. Wild hogs seem almost immune to the shock of high speed bullets that flatten deer and antelope. You need to make sure vital organs in the chest cavity are punctured.

The vital organs of a wild hog are further forward in the body than other hoofed game, with the heart resting right behind the foreleg, and the lungs at least half-way or more behind leg bones and shoulder. A lot of veteran hog hunters try to break the shoulder with stout bullets while puncturing lungs. This not only is a lethal shot, it usually knocks the hog down giving the hunter a little extra time for a follow-up shot if needed.



Shot placement on a big boar like this one is critical. The goal is to put the animal down quickly. Where do you hold on this shot?

Head shots: Since wild pigs have rather poor distance vision, it’s possible to get close enough to put a bullet directly into the brain. Target the base of the ear on a broadside presentation. If the pig is facing you head-on, then shoot just above the eyes and right between them. The results of such shots are dramatic.

On one occasion, I stalked to within scant yards of a big boar feeding in some tall grass. The pig had his head down and was facing in my direction. I placed the crosshair of my scope right in the

middle of his forehead. At the shot, the pig disappeared from sight. The guide thought that I’d missed. However, subsequent investigation proved that the animal had dropped straight down into the tall grass.

Even though such a shot is effective, if your bullet hits lower than anticipated, things can go awry. Should the bullet enter the upper nasal sinus cavity, it will most likely not reach the brain. The hog may go down, but be back on its feet almost instantly (not a good thing).

Neck shots: I’ve found this shot to be the most difficult of all. Pigs don’t have much in the way of a neck. And the spinal column dips down at that location considerable before it straightens out at the shoulders.

It’s possible to accurately place a bullet in the neck and have the pig go down like a sack of wet concrete. This occurs because of shock to the spinal cord. Give the animal a few minutes and it’ll recover. Once that happens, you may not have a follow-up shooting opportunity.

Spine shots: Most bullet-to-spinal column contact occurs by accident, rather than on purpose. You’ve either shot too high, or the pig was going straightaway. Even with a broken spine, a boar may have enough steam left to use his front legs for forward locomotion.

I once shot a hog that was running along a narrow cliff directly above my head. At the shot, the pig pitched forward off of the cliff and fell nearly right on top of me. Even though the bullet had severed the spine back of the ribs, the boar was up in an instant and intent on taking revenge on his tormentor (me). It took a subsequent shot to put an end to the matter.

Hunting wild pigs is a sport that demands optimal caliber — large bores are better for large boars — and a bullet choice that will perform on pigs, as well as a total commitment to precise bullet placement. Short of the big bears, wild pigs are this continent’s most dangerous game animal. Don’t ever underestimate these tenacious animals.

— Durwood Hollis



Bill Marchese of B&B Outfitting and Guide Service shows off a trophy boar taken on his ranch during the 2021 season. He says boars this size are not uncommon.

B&B OUTFITTING AND GUIDE SERVICE

Small operation almost completely booked up with repeat hog hunters

Bill Marchese at B&B Outfitting and Guide Service in Los Banos is normally booked by December for the coming year, but due to COVID, he still has some openings for 2022.

The operation is on an 1,100-acre ranch where he has been hunting for 50 years, guiding on the property since 1998. Marchese said guided hunters typically take 16 or so hogs a year on the property and all are taken spot-and-stalk hunting.

Price for a hunt is \$850 per person, and that price includes room, board, field dressing, and meat cooling. There is \$150 trophy hog is taken with two-inch or bigger tusks, and a second hog can be added by \$250. Hogs are not hunted from July through September. Marchese also offers bird hunting trips or combination birds and boars.

“Three-quarters of the oak trees are loaded with acorns,” said Marchese. “This is going to be a good year if mother nature keeps treating us well.”

For more information, contact Bill Marchese by office

phone at 209-827-6193 or cell phone at 209-704-1011. He doesn't have a website site or social media presence, doing things the “old fashioned way,” but you can reach him by e-mail at winchesterandbnm@att.net.

JIM PALM GUIDE SERVICE

Parkfield guide hunts two ranches and averages 60 to 80 hogs a year

Jim Palm guides on two ranches in the Parkfield area and said they harvest between 60 to 80 hogs a year between his guided hunts and his membership program. The ranches are about 2,500 acres each, and Palm has been guiding on the two properties for the past eight years.

Palm said they offer 10 annual individual memberships that allow for the harvest of four hogs, two turkeys, and dove and quail hunting for \$4,000 per year. He still has three memberships available for 2022.

Guided hunts take place year-around and cost \$700 per person and a deposit is required to hold a reservation. Hunters can camp on the property. The camp area has a skinning rack and barbecue. There is one motel in nearby Parkfield, along with a restaurant, for hunters who do not want to camp.

For more information, contact Jim Palm via cell phone at 805-235-4080 or e-mail cjpawn10@yahoo.com. You can also contact him via his personal Facebook page at [jim.palm.16](https://www.facebook.com/jim.palm.16).

CENTRAL COAST OUTFITTERS

Popular operation has cut back on hog hunts, focusing on elk and bear

Alfred Luis of Central Coast Outfitters in Santa Maria said this once-popular wild hog hunting destination has cut back on its pig hunts, now focusing mostly on tule elk, deer, bear, and turkeys.

But that could be changing soon.

Luis used to hunt on the expansive Jalama Ranch and he said he was negotiating with the ranch owners again for a hunting program, but he still has other properties with hogs.

Interested hunters should contact Luis via phone at 805-260-5991, e-mail at aluis@centralcoastoutfitters.com. He recommends hunters visit the website at <https://centralcoastoutfitters.com/> before calling or e-mailing.



These two hunters whacked this nice pair of hogs hunting with Jim Parks this past fall.

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CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE

Public hunting option is ignored in bill making killing depredation hogs easier

A bill introduced into the California legislature would reclassify wild hogs as “exotic” game and grant private landowners the right to kill wild hogs on their property, day or night, without significant oversight by the Department of Fish and Wildlife. It would also allow them to simply leave the killed pigs to rot in the field.

Sen. Bill Dodd (D-Napa) introduced the bill Jan. 19 this year, and in his introductory statement, said that “swelling numbers of wild pigs have become a scourge on California wildlands, endangering sensitive habitats, farms, and other animals.... My bill will increase opportunities to hunt them and do so more economically so that we may bring our pig population under control.”

In spite of Dodd’s press release material, the bill really doesn’t address the issues it claims, and his allegations about pigs are overblown.

Wild hog numbers have not grown in California the last several years due to drought, according to the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) data. Wild hog harvest, which is a good indicator of overall population levels, declined from 4,600 in 2016-17 to just over 3,900 for the 2020-21 season. It is also well below the modern peak of 7,800 hogs taken by hunters in the 1998-99 season.

The also bill does nothing to increase public hunter opportunity, according to Lisa McNamee with Safari Club International, which has organized a coalition of sporting groups opposing the legislation. She said the bill simply loosens the existing rules regarding landowners’ rights to take pigs causing crop or livestock damage.

“I get it. They’re wrecking your land, but the rules are so liberal now, you can take care of the problem without this bill,” said McNamee.

Landowners already have the right to kill wild hogs immediately when they are damaging crops or livestock, but they do have to get a depredation permit after the fact. They also have to report all pigs taken on the depredation permit so the DFW can keep track of harvest and pig numbers for management purposes. They also are supposed to see that the meat is utilized. SB 856 would eliminate the permitting, reporting, and salvage requirements. The bill would also eliminate the depredation permit fee, meaning landowners could kill pigs without charge while hunters have to purchase a pig tag for each hog killed.

Sporting groups across the state have aligned against the bill because it changes hogs’ classification, doesn’t offer an incentive for landowners to use the public hunters, either with a guide or through the SHARE program, and gives landowners special privileges. The wording of the bill would also put some hog hunting programs completely out of business. It would



TURNER’S OUTDOORSMAN WEBSITE

How can you subscribe to the new *California Hog Hunter* newsletter?

It’s easy.

There’s *not* really a subscription. The newsletter will be posted on the Turner’s Outdoorsman, Turner’s Outdoorsman, and *California Hog Hunter* websites four times per year (Mar. 15, June 15, Sept. 15, and Dec. 15).

Sign up for the weekly Turner’s Outdoorsman’s e-mails, and you will see a notification when the newsletter is published.

Watch the social media posts from *California Hog Hunter*, Turner’s Outdoorsman, Legacy Sports and Hornady.

The newsletter will be in PDF format so you can download it, read it, and share it with friends. Each issue will be archived so you can go back and download previous issues or post links to the issues.

prevent operations like Bighorn Canyon Ranch in Cherry Valley from releasing hogs inside their fenced 640-acres to supplement their wild pigs for hunters.

In a strange set of circumstances, Eric Sklar, a California Fish and Game Commissioner, has boasted that he helped author the bill. Sklar is a wine grape and pot grower in Napa Valley who has had wild hog depredation problems. He is also a co-founder of the Napa Valley Cannabis Association. The Fish and Game Commission (FGC) is the state body charged with setting regulations regarding hunting, fishing, and wildlife in the state, including depredation problems faced by landowners. Since the FGC also regulates legal pot-growing in the state, Sklar is required by law to recuse himself on all votes the Commission makes related to pot growing.

Yet, at a recent FGC meeting, Sklar asked the Commission to support SB 856 saying on record that there was no opposition to the bill. In fact, sporting groups across the state have been adamantly against the bill because it allows for waste of game and doesn’t offer an incentive for landowners to use the public hunters, either with a guide or through the SHARE program. Groups like the Safari Club believe the Commission should opposed the legislation.

-- Jim Matthews

Two nationally-known hunting writers, Durwood Hollis and John Higley (both who wrote for the original California Hog Hunter) passed away in 2020. We included their obituaries here because so many of you knew them, if not personally, by their tales.



OBITUARY

Durwood Hollis, well-known hog, knife, and hunting writer, dead at 80

Durwood Hollis, a long-time guns, hunting, and knife writer from Rancho Cucamonga, died Saturday, Aug. 22, 2020. Many sportsmen across Southern California and the country knew Hollis from his hunting and knife writing and hog hunting seminars. He was 80.

Hollis wrote five books on hunting, including *Upland Game & Waterfowl*; *North American Big Game*, *Hunting Knives*; *Elk: Strategies for the Hunter*; *The Complete Game Care Guide*; and *Hunting Monster Mule Deer* (co-authored with Duwane Adams), and two books on knives, *Knifemaking with Bob Loveless*, a world famous knife maker, and *Hunting Knives*. Hollis hunted all over North America and had traveled to Africa and Europe in pursuit of stories.

Hollis was born in Los Angeles July 8, 1940 and graduated from Westchester High School before attending El Camino College where he earned his associate degree. He then attended Brigham Young University and then Cal State Los Angeles, graduating with a bachelor of arts degree in May, 1969. Durwood also served in the U.S. Army Reserves.

Durwood worked for the Los Angeles County Health Department for 35 years, retiring in 2005. He worked as a private investigator before working for the county. Throughout those years at the Health Department also wrote and traveled extensively. Hollis faithfully attended church every Sunday

– unless he was away hunting.

Hollis is survived by his wife Anita, children Kailea Hollis, Dustin Hollis, Brendan Hollis, Karlynda Thornburg and Kristen Black. He also has 18 grandchildren.

OBITUARY

John Higley, popular hunting and fishing writer, dies at 83

John R. Higley, a well-known California outdoor writer and avid hunter and angler from Palo Cedro, died after a brief illness Nov. 17, 2020. He was 83.

Higley published around 1,000 magazine articles during his long career, his work regularly published in *California Fish and Game* magazine, *Outdoor Life*, *Field & Stream*, the National Wild Turkey Federation's magazine, and many, many others over his 50-plus year career as an outdoor writer.

His books included *Hunting Blacktail Deer*, *Hunting Wild Turkeys in the West*, and *Successful Turkey Hunting*

Higley worked full-time doing landscape maintenance, during the day (until just a couple of weeks before his death). He wrote three to six hours most evenings and did field research on weekends and the occasional time off from his day-to-day business. He was also a member of the Outdoor Writers Association of America for 55 years and a long-time member of the National Wild Turkey Federation.

Higley was born April 4, 1937 in Los Angeles. He was married for 39 years until the death of his wife Judith, and is survived by his three children, Mark and Mike Higley and his daughter Meredith Feamster along with eight grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren. He also is survived by his life partner the past 23 years, Sharon.



Wild boar or plain old hogs gone wild?

So, is that big old boar you just hammered on a Central Coast ranch a Russian boar or just a plain old domestic hog gone wild a few generations back?

The answer is “yes.”

Scientists group swine into four basic categories. They are: Eurasian wild boar, domestic swine, feral hogs gone wild, and feral-Eurasian wild boar hybrids. The dead giveaway is that they all have the same scientific name — *sus scrofa*.

The only difference is that domestic hogs have been selective bred for certain traits by humans for a long, long time, and some of them resemble a true wild boar from eastern Europe about as much as a poodle resembles a wolf.

Some wild hogs in California look remarkably like their wild cousins of Europe. They have a laterally-compressed body profile, straight tail that hangs down between their legs, slim hips and large front shoulders, and a long, pointy snout. Compared to a domestic “porky pig,” it has a dense covering of long body hair, with a mane or “comb” of erect hair bristles along the neck and spine.

The wild boar we hunt in California are a cross between the pure-strain European wild boar first introduced into the state in the early 20th century, and the feral swine with which they freely interbred when the two met up in the foothills of the Central Coast. More and more domestic hogs either escaped or were release from pens over the years and freely bred the hogs already in the wild. Today, when you see a “wild boar” in the field in California, you cannot be absolutely sure how much of the “wild strain” it really carries in its genes.

Both pure-strain wild boar and domestic swine are members of the scientific family, and can freely interbreed. The difference between them is in each hog’s chromosome count, though how that count differs can also be confusing. For some time it was believed that a pure-strain wild boar has a total of 36 chromosomes, while a pure domestic pig has 38 chromosomes. When two pure-strain animals mate, the resulting piglets possess 37 chromosomes. However, let the offspring interbreed, and you now have piglets that may have 36, 37, or 38 chromosomes — whatever happens to please Mother Nature and that particular molecule of DNA at the time.

This difference was reported by V.G. Henry in 1969 in the Journal of Tennessee Academy of Science, who incorrectly described the following three basic differences between pure wild boar and feral and/or hybrid hogs: The pure wild hogs showed a striped pattern in the juvenile pelagic covering, or hair; split tips on the guard hairs; and a diploid chromosome count of 36, while feral and domestic swine did not have the split guard hairs and striped juvenile patterns, and had a diploid chromosome count of 38.

However, it has since been shown that both the juvenile striped coloration patterns and split guard hairs occur in feral and hybrid hogs as well. Also, research has shown that an

animal with 36 chromosomes could be either a wild boar or a hybrid, one with 37 chromosomes could be either a wild boar, hybrid, or feral hog, and an animal with 38 chromosomes could also be any of these three or a domestic pig.

All this is a bit confusing to an old farm boy like me. Be that as it may, hunt hogs a while and you’ll soon see individual differences that seem subtle at first glance, but really tell you a lot. Some California wild hogs just “look” wilder than others. Regardless of their chromosome count or outward appearance, sportsmen refer to all the swine they hunt as “wild boar.”

Generally speaking, scientific research enables us to tell the difference between wild and domestic swine by comparing body morphology, or type.

Body Length & Height: In general, domestic pigs have a longer total body length than either pure wild boar or feral hogs. Also, domestic swine tend to be taller at the shoulder than the various wild types, and tend to have the heaviest body weights.

Tail Length: Wild boar and hybrid hogs also have shorter tails than domestic swine and feral pigs. Wild boar tails are also always straight, while domestic pigs, as well as feral and hybrid hogs, can have either a straight or curly tail. (However, wild hogs can actually temporarily curl their tails through muscle action.)

Ear Length: Ear length is longest in domestic swine, with feral hogs next, and wild and hybrid hogs having the shortest ears. Wild swine have erect ears, in contrast to the floppy ears of domestic pigs.

Snout Length: True wild boar have the longest snouts when mature, with hybrid hogs next.

Hair coloration: The hair color is very distinct between true wild boar and the various feral and hybrid pigs. Studies have shown true wild boar are the only hogs that have a single coat color pattern, that being grizzled. These studies included both wild hogs from Eurasia and also those from both New Hampshire and Texas. This coat color features a dark color with grizzled, or lightly-tipped, hairs covering the entire body save for the face, ears, tail, and snout. No spotted, belted, or completely solid-colored individuals were observed in these studies. In contrast, feral hogs most commonly show a coal-black color, followed by a black-and-reddish/brown or reddish/brown color. A reddish/brown with white shoulder belt is also relatively common, seen in about 27 percent of the samples observed. Spotted hogs are relatively rare. Also, only the wild strains of hogs have curly, wool-like underfur. All pure-strain wild boar have this dense underfur, while about three-fourths of feral and hybrid hogs have this characteristic. This underfur is primarily black, though it can be a smoky gray to a dirty white.

The reality is that they are all pretty much the same and taste great on the barbecue.

— **Bob Robb**

Veteran guide faces charging boar

With a hunt schedule winding down, long-time Tejon Ranch guide Darrell Francis was going to take time to do his own hog hunt. I would ride along to offer “support.” I think that equates to, “Help drag hog.” Now having seen our share of large hogs over the years, we were a little skeptical when our buddy, Joe Ryan, said he had seen the largest hog he had seen in years, maybe the biggest ever. Darrell was only interested in a true wall hanger, and Joe’s hog description sure seemed to fit the bill.

Armed with the location Joe had last seen old “pigzilla,” we were off at first light. We were in a canyon bottom dotted with old oaks, pines and sycamores. After an hour or so of looking, we spotted a bunch of hogs out ahead about 300 yards. A few sows were on the left bank of the low creek bottom. As we glassed we could see more hogs enter the bottom and drop out of sight. We left the truck and Darrell edged up on the hogs. We had good wind and some cover provided by boulders and trees in the canyon bottom.

When we closed to about 100 yards a sow looked up and caught us in the open. We had to freeze. When she lost interest in us, she joined the other hogs in the creek bottom. That gave us our chance to close the gap. At 60 yards we could hear the big boar fighting in among the rocks. He sounded big and he sounded bad.

The hogs started up the other side of the creek and we had our first look at “Pigzilla.”

Not only was this a very large hog but also he had enough hair for two hogs. I have always said when you want to harvest a hog for a shoulder mount you need to look for great hair not teeth. A taxidermist can replace teeth but can do little for a bald hog.

Darrell waited until the hog reached the top of the flat and got out into the open. With a good rest, Darrell found the giant hog in his crosshairs and squeezed off a round from his .270 Winchester. Darrell’s shot struck the hog right behind the shoulder and a cloud of dust rose from the hog’s long black hair.

Now 20 or 30 hogs started a mass exodus from the creek bottom. This made a follow-up shot impossible. We watched the wounded boar move into some rabbit brush to the east. Darrell went to move the truck up as I tracked the boar. When Darrell returned, we started moving into the brush where we’d last seen the boar. Now moving through waist high brush looking for a wounded boar is not my idea of fun. Especially when the hog is Pigzilla.

Did I mention big teeth?

After a few intense minutes, I spotted the beast off to our right. He was bedded down, sick from Darrell’s first shot, watching our every move.

“Shoot him now,” I whispered as I got Darrell’s attention.

“I don’t want to shoot him in the head. Let’s move around to his side,” said Darrell.



Late Tejon Ranch guide Darrell Francis faced down a charging boar on this 2004 hunt remembered by guide Ron Gayer. The hog took two good hits from Francis’ .270 and still had the steam to mount a charge.

We moved slowly, circling the bleeding hog. I expected him to charge at any moment, and I was only carrying my camera. We reached a broadside position and Darrell readied for his second shot. I dropped behind Darrell and took an over the shoulder position so I might take a photo with Darrell in the frame with the giant hog. When Darrell fired he hit the hog right behind the point of the shoulder. But as soon as the .270 barked, the hog jumped to his feet and started his charge at Darrell.

The boar had been watching our every movement and knew exactly where to direct his 350 pounds of hog flesh. I took a photo over Darrell’s shoulder as the hog closed in on the diminutive Mr. Francis. Thirty yards became 20, then 10, and I bailed out, hiding behind a small pine as Darrell faced off with his charging adversary. I was amazed as Darrell just stood his ground, rifle at the ready. I was not sure he had bolted in a new round after his last shot. The twice-wounded boar opened his jaws wide as he approach Darrell. Flipping his head to the side, he tried to “hook” the hunter as he thundered by in a cloud of dust. Forty yards later the hog piled up on a cut road and the thunderous charge came to an end. The shoulder hit had been lethal, just not immediately so.

Afterwards Darrell said, “I don’t know why I wasn’t scarred. I thought if he got too close I would just stick my barrel in his mouth and pull the trigger.”

I still don’t know if Darrell had a live round in the chamber or if he was planning on just feeding the hog the whole gun.

— Ron Gayer



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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.

All Season Outfitters, 9670 Martin Lane, Prunedale, CA 93907. Tony Phelps: 831-214-7073. E-mail: pighuntcalifornia@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. Clayton Grant owner/operator: 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. Guide Todd Renz: 831-750-5027. E-mail: todd@bucksboarsandbirds.com. Website: <https://bucksboarsandbirds.com/>.

Camp Five Outfitters, 77502 Hog Canyon Rd., San Miguel, CA 93451. Dawson Work: 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. Telephone: 805-260-5991. E-mail: aluis@centralcoastoutfitters.com. Website: <https://centralcoastoutfitters.com/>.

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

Hog Canyon Hunts, Paso Robles, CA. Guide 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. Rifle guide, Jeremy Fairbanks: 559-707-9159. Archery guide, Larry Greve: 559-935-5788 or mobile 559-269-0564. Website: <https://hogswild.com/>.

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

Indian Rock Ranch, Glenville, CA. Guide Ron Gayer. E-Mail: elkron98@gmail.com. Website: <https://theguides-gidetohunting.com/>.

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

Nessen Schmidt Guide Service, 105 Oasis Rd., King City,

CA 93930. Nessen Schmidt: 831-385-1335. Website: <http://nessenschmidtguideservice.com/>.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Twisselman Ranch, 7645 Cattle Dr., Santa Margarita, CA. Phone: 805-459-2160. E-mail: twisselmanoutfit@aol.com. Website: <https://www.twisselmanranch.com/>.

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

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

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

TELL OTHER READERS ABOUT YOUR HUNT

Want to share your hunt? Fill out the PDF form and get your hog story published in the newsletter

California Hog Hunter makes it easy to share information about your hunt with an on-line form you can download, fill out, and return to us with a photo or two to go with your information.

We'll try to get in as many of these photos and stories as possible. Of course, big hogs and good photos, kids with first hogs, important guide information, and great yarns will get the nod over blurry photos and stories too good to be true. Help out those guides and outfitters who made your hunt a great one and let other readers know how good a job they do. The PDF form on one the California Hog Hunter website.

What do you pack along on your hunts?

As hunters, we know that once the animal hits the ground, the real work begins. Field cleaning and processing your animal quickly and properly is a huge part of being a successful and ethical big game hunter. In my opinion, being prepared for everything before you leave the truck will make the entire field dressing process easier and cleaner. Here's how I pack in.

When I'm prepping for a day hunt, I always keep the mindset that I will be successful. This guides me on how I'll pack up for the hunt. I choose a day pack that will at the very least carry two pig quarters. I have two hard frame packs and a pack that has what they call a meat shelf on the bottom to better distribute the weight hiking out and two large volume packs with padded hip straps. All these packs will get the job done and are what I choose when I head out to hunt.

In order to carry meat out from a successful meat hunt, your pack should be sparsely packed on the way in and carry only the essentials for packing meat out. In short, it should be close to empty. I don't subscribe to overloading a pack and then carrying stuff in your hands when you're packing meat out. I like to have my hands free to help keep my balance. This can't happen easily if your hands are full.

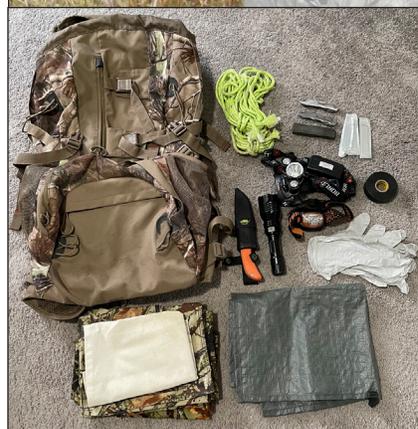
Waters and snacks are what I pack as far as day trip nourishment. Small protein bars don't take up much room and pack enough energy to keep you going throughout the day. They are also clearly on-the-go calories that can be eaten as you move or quickly at a glassing spot. I'll consume an entire bottle of water at the truck before I head out. Two more are tossed in the pack.

Moving on to the essential gear, I have a small, zippered knife case that holds the following: two replaceable-blade knives, extra blades, a fixed blade knife, a smaller sharpening stone, several pairs of latex gloves, a roll of electrical tape, a length of rope, several meat bags, two head lamps, a flashlight, a small first aid kit, and a small piece of tarp. If I'm headed out for wild hogs, this is what's in my pack.

Most of this gear is commonplace and is likely what any hunter would carry with them during a hunt, but several of these items are just as important to the cutting tools to me. Being a biologist, I'm well aware of the zoonotic diseases that can be passed to humans when processing wild animals. I choose to wear latex gloves whenever I field dress anything just to add an additional layer of protection.

Several lengths of ropes have proven well worth the addition to my big game pack. Tying legs to trees during the skinning process is like having another set of hands. Also, having a little rope to firm up a packer's load for the hike out makes having it better than not having it.

About a decade ago I started adding a small eight-foot square piece of tarp to my process pack. It's cheap, weighs almost nothing and provides a clean surface to place quarters and backstraps on while the processing is taking place. To



Alyssa Hovey, the author's daughter, has two wild pig quarters stashed into her pack. Using a large, padded and spacious pack like this one, the hike out is more comfortable. Only carry the essentials during a pig hunt (see text for details of contents). The pack should be sturdy and almost empty on the way in.

assist in cooling the meat, I'll occasionally turn the pieces on the tarp to cool both sides.

Items you carry in should absolutely aid you in some way during the pack out process. In my opinion, if it doesn't fill a need, it stays at the truck.

To me, nothing beats the reward of getting back to the truck with all your wild meat properly field dressed and packed out. This all starts with being prepared and carrying what you need into the back country. Pack what you need, pack light, and shoot straight.

— Tim E. Hovey

You should be reloading for your hunting

Most of the old timers I know have been reloading their own centerfire ammunition since they were teenagers. I was 16 years old when I started some 50-plus years ago.

Reloading is the simple process of taking a fired brass cartridge case, resizing it back to like-new dimensions, punching out the fired primer and replacing it with a new one, adding the correct type and amount of powder, and then seating a new bullet into the cartridge case. The finished product is a new round of ammunition made at home.

We reloaded for a variety of reasons in those distant years: It was far cheaper than buying new ammunition. You couldn't get some of the best hunting, target, or varmint bullets in loaded rounds. Usually, fine-tuned reloaded ammunition was far more accurate than factory ammunition. While all of those reasons still apply today, they don't apply to the same degree they did back in the 1970s and 80s. The variety and quality of factory ammunition is greater than it has ever been.

The "cheaper" reason is still probably the biggest draw for most shooters and hunters who have gravitated to reloading in recent years. One of the biggest costs in ammunition is the brass cartridge case, and they can be used many times by the judicious reloader.

The California legislature gave gun owners a new reason to start reloading with the moronic ammunition registration and background check mandate that has been in affect since 2019. The legislation also prevented California gun owners from mail-ordering ammunition or buying ammunition except from in-state licensed ammunition dealers. We are technically barred from bringing ammunition into California that we purchase over-the-counter in other states.

Those of us who reload aren't affected by these rules because we deal in components. You can still buy bullets, brass, powder, and primers over the counter without registration and background checks. You are still able to order over the Internet (from in or out of state) and have all the components delivered to your home or business.

If you shoot centerfire rifle, pistol, or shotgun ammunition, you can take up reloading to legally skirt the onerous legislative mandates. Reloading also allows you to get around some of the ammunition shortages. While components are also in short supply, they are more available than ammunition both at instate stores like Turner's Outdoorsman or via mail order sales.

Finding non-lead ammunition for our big game hunting in California can be problematic, especially if you like to shoot something other than the most popular cartridges. If you happen to own a .280 Remington or .257 Roberts and want a box of non-lead ammo, you might be hard-pressed to find a box. Or if you shoot the uber-popular 6.5mm Creedmoor or .308 Winchester, this ammo often sells out as soon as it's put on a shelf. We've all dealt with this problem as hunters.

But if you reload, finding .257, .264, .284 or .308-inch



Reloading gives hunters to ability to load for old classics like the 30-30 (left) that might not have readily available non-lead ammunition, or the latest popular rounds like the 6mm Creedmoor (right) that might be sold out as fast as ammunition goes on the shelf, or interesting wildcat rounds like the .25-270 WSM (center). Hornady has replaced the GMX line of non-lead bullets with the new, improved CX (copper alloy expanding) bullets for 2022. Today, non-lead bullets are available for virtually all calibers meaning any old, new, or wildcat round can be loaded to make it California-legal.

diameter non-lead bullets is not an impossible task. In fact, non-lead bullets are available in virtually every caliber on the market — from 22 to 458.

Starting with a reloading kit makes a lot of sense for new reloaders because the bundling of the essential pieces are included in all kits for a discounted price. Most kits come with a press, scale, powder measure, loading block, and other items. You simply add sizing and bullet seating dies for each cartridge you want to load. Kits range from around \$200 to over \$700 for more elaborate sets. Most of the kits around \$400 will last most shooters a lifetime without a need to upgrade. Assuming you have saved brass for your firearms, all you have to add are bullets, primers, and powder to be in business — figure another \$100.

For less than the cost of five boxes of premium ammo (at \$80 to \$100 per box), you can be set up to reload that same 100 rounds of ammunition or more. The subsequent boxes of reloaded ammo are where the big savings kick in.

There are lots of good on-line reloading tutorials, and reloading formulas (the correct powder, charge weight, or a given weight bullet) are available on-line free from most powder companies. Reloading manuals also come with most kits.

Setting up a small reloading bench in a garage or inside a house or apartment is simple. My bench for the past 30-plus years measures a scant 24x24-inches on the top and stands 41 1/2-inches tall. It holds my single-stage reloading press, digital powder scale, and powder measure, along with a loading block. I have never felt cramped with this set-up, and I have loaded thousands of rounds over the years for a variety of rifle and handgun cartridges.

I shoot a lot of odd-ball stuff — a .358 Winchester, a 9.3x62, and a wildcat .25-270 WSM — but I can hunt with these guns because I reload my own non-lead ammunition.

— Jim Matthews