

First deer hunt left a lasting impression

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Fredericksburg. I do not remember what they called the ranch, but today it is known as Enchanted Rock State Park.

Jack offered to take some of the older Scouts to the ranch for a deer hunt as long as our fathers accompanied us.

Some Scouts had their own rifles or used their father's, but since my Dad was neither a hunter nor shooter, I borrowed a Winchester 94 .30-30. Jack insisted that all those going on the hunt sight in their rifles the week-end before, just to make sure each boy knew the rifle and could make a good shot.

We all went to my family's land in Grayson County, north of Dallas. In 1961, there were no deer in that area. We shot our rifles and showed that if given a shot we could take a deer humanely.

Jack gave us a short version of his hunter safety class. Among other things, he instructed us to sit and wait for about 15 minutes after we took our shot, and on how to field-dress a deer.

The next week was a very long one for me because of the anticipation. I had shot small game with my .22

for a few years and dove with my Ithaca 12-gauge but no deer.

It was in the first part of December when we left Dallas, and the weather was cold.

We stayed in an old house on the ranch that stood where the park office is today. It had single walls that during the day you could see daylight between the boards.

After a cold, sleepless night on old military cots, we all headed out to hunt. My Dad and I had an area across the highway that was just a series of hills and valleys, kind of like an old wash board.

Not a lot of camouflage was sold in those days, mostly Army surplus. Dad and I dressed in the warmest clothes we had. We walked a lot, up and down hills, occasionally seeing deer on the opposite hill. We were just pushing the deer in front of us. I think we actually wore them out, as well as us.

We stopped on the side of a hill and ate our lunch while sitting on a huge piece of granite. After discussing the morning's stalk, we decided to try to be quieter and move slower. This tactic worked.

As we went over the next hill I got a shot at a mature doe. She was

on the opposite hill, and the shot was around 100 yards. The .30-30 did its job, and down she went.

Dad insisted I go back to camp and get some help to get the doe back, since we were a good distance from camp. When I got back with some help, I found Dad already had field-dressed the deer -- or at least made an attempt.

We got the doe back to camp and hung it in a huge oak tree that stood beside where we were staying. Jack cleaned up Dad's work and showed me how to skin and quarter a deer.

Each of the Scouts got a deer, and there was no shortage of big smiles among the group.

The next day I spent hiking to the top of this giant solid pink granite mountain that rises about 500 feet. Stories are told about two Texas Rangers who held off a large group of Indians from the top with cap and ball revolvers.

The mountain is also prominent in many Indian legends.

As we were checking out with the ranch foreman, a carload of hunters drove up with three people in the rear seat. In the middle of these three was a very young boy. Suddenly a shot rang out, and the bullet narrowly

missed my Dad.

I looked back and as they opened the rear door I saw that the boy had the rifle in his hands. Luckily no one was hurt, but the car door had a big hole in it. That incident made a lasting impression on me and later resulted in my teaching hunter education.

That Christmas a brand-new Winchester Model 94 .30-30 was under the tree for me because it was obvious I was hooked on deer hunting.

Mike and I went on to make Eagle Scouts, were both police officers, and now both of us write about shooting and hunting. We still try to get together at least once a year to hunt and shoot.

Today Enchanted Rock State Park is just as beautiful. The state has done a wonderful job maintaining the park's real enchantment. Rock climbers flock there to take advantage of the granite formations and to repel. With over 1,600 acres, it is a great place to hike, picnic or hold a primitive campout.

Each year the park is closed a few days to allow for hunting by drawn permit. Last year more than 1,000 hunters applied for 15 permits, but hunter success was over 100 percent.

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