

The Parting Shot

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There is something special about longbows and the people that shoot them. I've tried to put my finger on it from time to time, or put words to it for people who don't shoot them, but it never really works out. Since most of the events I attend are either MLA events, or events that I am attending with other MLA members, I sometimes mistakenly think of this as being something completely unique to our organization. This winter I took a little trip far away from Michigan and the folks I've been shooting and hunting with for the last few years to go shoot longbows with some folks from all over North America.

A little more than a year ago a gentleman started a new discussion on the tradgang.com internet forum stating that he wanted to organize a hog hunt for exclusively "Howard Hill style longbows." With that the "Hill Gang Hog Hunt 2013" began to come together, and it was held February 22nd thru 24th this year in Georgia. Around 70 people responded with interest to the discussion, and most people submitted a form with the specs of the bows they planned to bring. A list was published of the bows coming to the hunt sorted by right/left hand, make, model, length, and weight. With this, folks started chatting online and planning on what bows they wanted to shoot.

On the way down to camp, I coordinated a lunch meet-up with two hunting buddies in Atlanta for the day before the start of the hunt. Steve Angell is an MLA member and STICKTALK contributor. The other fella is a longtime longbow shooter but has never been a member. During the meal Steve mentioned that he was hoping to make it to the GLLI one of these years, then the other guy mentioned that he had attended several in the past. I could hardly imagine that this gentleman from Georgia had found his way to our little shindig multiple times! Apparently the longbow family stretches far and wide!

Several hours after lunch I arrived in the central Georgia swamp and found the campground. I got my camp set up and went around meeting my neighbors. There were hunters from all over! Lots from down south, but there were also guys from Canada, Montana, Colorado, Texas, Maine, as well as other states scattered about. I started talking to a couple of guys and mentioned that I was from Michigan; turns out they too had traveled to Michigan to attend GLLI as well! Now I think quite a bit of our big event, and I think quite a bit about our organization being world class, but it was very cool to be that far from home and have strangers affirm that.

Standing around camp the next day, a man from North Carolina walked up and joined the campfire conversation, he was carrying a Michigan made longbow and he passed it around for everyone to look at. I own the exact same model with a different finish so I went and brought that for people to look at and shoot. About this time a fellow from Kentucky showed up with his longbow that was built by another Michigan bowyer. Coincidentally I also had brought a bow from that bowyer as my backup bow for the hunt; I fetched it for a pass around the group as well. Several other bows joined in the inspection, appreciation, and shooting and I moved back in the crowd a little bit to observe. It was great watching a lot of lifetime shooters compare handing characteristics and build quality, and it was really great to see Michigan made longbows held in such high regard!

Some of my favorite moments of the camp came just after this, and they had absolutely nothing to do with Michigan, other than there was one Michigander there to enjoy it. Howard Hill Archery had sent some bows to the gathering with one of the hunters/collectors. We got to handle bows and equipment either built by, or for, Howard Hill going all the way back to the 1930s. Heck one of the mid 1950's Bob Stotler era bows still had the original price tag on it!



A rectangular advertisement for 'MAGNUM ARTS AUTUMN SCARBROUGH'. The text 'MAGNUM ARTS' is at the top in a serif font. Below it, 'AUTUMN SCARBROUGH' is written in a larger, spaced-out serif font. Underneath, it lists 'WOODWORKING, T-SHIRTS, MUGS, HATS, MOUSEPADS, AND MORE!' in a smaller font. On the right side, there is a small illustration of a turkey's head. On the left side, there is a small illustration of a tree.

A rectangular advertisement for 'TRADITIONAL ARCHERY SHOPPE'. The title is in a large, red, serif font. Below it, the tagline 'Serving The Traditional Bowhunter Since 1980' is in a smaller, italicized serif font. The name 'Ron LaClair' is in a bold, black, serif font. Below that, the address 'P.O. Box 145 • 242 Benton St. Potterville, MI 48876' and phone number 'Ph.: 517-645-7729' are listed. At the bottom, the website 'www.shrewbows.com' and email 'ron@shrewbows.com' are provided.

One of the most interesting conversations I had during the event came on Sunday as I was packing up my camp. A member of the Traditional Bowhunters of Texas dropped by and we got to talking about the Texas State Longbow Championship and the GLLI. It was interesting that we were both familiar with each other's shoots although neither of us had attended the others. Although the events are entirely different, they hold a common bond in being exclusively longbow events. They also hold the same unique challenges in defining "longbows" and the arrows and shooting styles that should go with them. I appreciate that other organizations have to ask themselves the same hard questions and come to their own answers, it lets me know that what we have and what we are preserving is very worthy of the considerations and debates that go on behind the scenes. At least there aren't a set of easy answers that are being overlooked! After talking at length about the soul-searching that can take place while defining "longbows" and "traditional" we shook hands and bid farewell.

I am blessed to live where I do. I fully enjoy all the hunting and events that happen in our backyard, but taking this little trip to Georgia taught me a few things. People brought together and bonded by their love of this pastime are spread to the winds; there isn't really an epicenter for the people, clubs, or companies. While Michigan isn't the center of the longbow universe, we certainly are one of a very few special pockets of avid shooters,

talented bowyers, and wonderful companies that support this community with associated tackle, knives, wool, etc. The last thing I came to understand more deeply as I pondered some of these events is that things the MLA does are relevant far beyond our borders. Of course the GLLI is a longstanding tradition in its own right, but even a brand new event like our first ever National Arrow Contest brought out participation from some of our extended family from coast to coast.



As we celebrate our 30th year I'd like to invite everyone to contemplate for a while what makes this organization great, to reflect on what made some of our past events so successful, and to consider if there is anything that might make a future event even better!



Welcome New Members

And those who have been away

Dan Cousinau
 Matt Gundock
 Tom Brenman
 Frank Stevens
 Chuck Boelter
 Al Duckworth
 Alan Harford
 Mark Meyers
 Mark Gillette
 Jim Doolittle
 Keith Stotts
 Daniel Fiske
 Aggie Vines
 Jeff Minnis
 Jstin White
 Josh Brink
 Alan Metz
 Mike Fry

Rebecca & Lance Emery
 Shane & Chelsea Close
 Tad & Anna McCrumb
 Charles & Amy Gault
 Don & Karen Martin
 Ted & Janet Judson
 Arnel Almendral
 Marc Kavinaugh
 Donovan Watson
 Darrell Williams
 Matthew Meyers
 Marlowe Durn
 Calvin Meabon
 Jason Hayward
 Vernon Huston
 Chuck Schmidt
 William James
 Aaron Schultz

Jock McCrumb
 Sheila Clayton
 Dick Hermann
 Linda Clayton
 Mark Forman
 Laura Hessell
 Dave Wagner
 Robert Burns
 Gerty Zigman
 Samuel Fleet
 Eric Herbert
 Melissa Cole
 Paul Ladner
 Kevin Palto
 Mike Theis
 Brent Cole
 Bob Glegg