



TOM CLAYCOMB
BASE CAMP

Gift tips for the outdoor enthusiast on your list

One fun thing about being an outdoor writer is that I get to test a lot of new gear. It amazes me how many new items come out every year. I have seminars at all of the big shows in January, the Dallas Safari Club Conv. & Expo, the SHOT and the Safari Club International Convention in Vegas. So of course, 99.999% of the manufacturers will be there displaying their new gear for 2022 as well as their old tried and true products.

If you just met an outdoorsman/woman and don't know what to buy them for Christmas don't panic, Santa's little helper is here to help you out. In some ways outdoors enthusiasts are easy to buy for. We love our gear. And if we just had the latest, greatest item, we're convinced that we will finally be successful. But — it does have to be the exact item or you might as well burn your money and give them a bag of rocks because it will have the same effect.

But the good news is, you don't necessarily have to spend a bundle to light up their eyes. Everyone has a budget. So I will list some economical gifts on up to the blow-their-socks-off items. Here are some items that tested out well for me over 2021 or items that have stood the test of time.

- Fishing lures. Make sure you get the exact ones/colors that your angler prefers
- Browning hiking socks. Great for hunting, fishing, backpacking or hiking
- 5.11 tactical pants. Katy and I both love these. They're nice looking, durable and functional
- XGO base layers
- Axil electronic hearing protection
- Smith's knife sharpening gear. I use their fine diamond stones. They're the best
- Smith's electric knife sharpener for the kitchen
- Otis Lead Free Wipes
- Flashlight — the ASP Dual Fuel Raptor
- Hi Mountain Seasoning — they make awesome jerky and sausage seasoning packs. The best on the market
- Real Avid cleaning rods
- Caldwell sand bags
- Trulock shotgun chokes
- Alps Mountaineering Taurus 2 tent, Blaze +20 sleeping bag, Nimble air mat and Dash backpacking chair
- Versacarry holsters
- Boyds' gunstocks, they make some cool wood stocks
- Blackfire clamplights, great for working on your truck in the dark or in camp while backpacking
- Chard Jerky Gun

Knives

- Knives of Alaska Professional Boning Knife
- KOA Elk Hunter
- If you want some economical folders check out the line up from Smith's Consumer Products
- For a nice kitchen set check out the Smith's Cabin and Lodge Cutlery Set
- Spyderco Counter Pups, great kitchen knives
- Benchmade Claymore, nice assisted opening knife

Ultimate gifts

- If you want to cut out the chaff and blow him/her out of the water here are the ticket items:
 - Mantis X10 Elite Shooting Performance System. The Mantis X10 is a great tool to help you become a better shot
 - Diamond Blade knives They have too many cool ones to list but check out their Summit, Heritage or Surge knives. DB has won

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Turkey Tactics

Hunting tips for NE Oregon's Rio Grandes



BRAD TRUMBO
UPLAND PURSUITS

A heavy fog hung in the pines, cloaking the 40-some birds high above my brushy ground cover in their evergreen roost. Turkeys had flocked up for winter, and like clockwork entered their routine of roosting in a small pine strip along a creek bottom.

Soft yelps and clucks wafting from the canopy were barely audible above the babbling water, but evolved into a boisterous cacophony as the sun fought to tear through the fallen ceiling. Having never mastered the art of calling turkeys, I sat quietly, awaiting the birds' vacation from roost.

As visibility increased to about 30 yards, the unharmonious ruckus from overhead fell silent. Had I moved? Had they heard me? My mind raced with the paranoid cogitations of a turkey hunter familiar with failure. Moments later, the pines erupted. Turkeys spewed from all angles in unison, hidden entirely by fog; their heavy wing beats showering the understory with the mist deposited among the pine needles. A short glide carried them to a nearby wheat field where tender green sprouts topped the breakfast menu. Waiting and glassing patiently allowed the birds time to feed back into the timber. Time to make a move.

Believe it or not, turkeys that flock up in the fall are far easier to hunt in brushy and timbered cover than in the spring. You can get away with movement that would never fly when trying to call that lovesick tom. I sprang from my seat beneath the shelter of a pine and weaved into



Brad Trumbo/Contributed Photo

The author with a colossal fall Rio hen, taken with his Grandpa's Ithaca Model 37 pump.

the timber along the edge of an old road.

Movement through a tangle of downed pines, rose, and service-berry prompted me to dive behind a large tree trunk while three Rio Grande hens emerged onto the old road clearing. My peering around the trunk caught the birds' attention but merely held their gaze, allowing me to raise Grandpa's old Ithaca model 37 pump to shoulder and settle on the biggest old hen. A single shell of 2¼-inch, four-shot steel secured my prize destined for a baking dish with garlic, spices, and local bacon.

Sound like a "once in a blue moon" opportunity? That was my

assumption, given my inability to remain concealed from these birds during spring. But year after year I've filled turkey tags in the same general area, waiting in the dark for the birds to leave roost and making a move on them just as I would a mule deer buck, using terrain and vegetation to close the distance.

Wild turkeys are not native to Oregon and our local Rio Grandes were introduced in 1975. They thrive in the Blue Mountains foothills because the narrow riparian strips with a mix of trees and shrubs flanked by dryland crops resemble their native south-central US and Northern Mexico

habitats. These thick covers also provide ample concealment for slipping in on a flock of fall birds.

Although not expressly stated in literature, turkeys often select conifers for roosting, and having a basic understanding of fall habitat and forage preferences is more than half the battle for fall hunting success. Spotting a flock is relatively easy, and in my experience, they generally remain within close proximity to their preferred winter food sources.

Fall calling tactics include busting up flocks and calling them back with hen yelps, but sitting and calling are two activities that I have failed to master. Spot-and-stalk is far more productive for those of us unable to remain still, and is highly effective on flocks of 10 or more birds as safety-in-numbers appears to be a mindset for the Rio Grande turkey. Hens have pegged me nearly every time I move in on the flock, but a quick stand-still allows unsuspecting turkeys to filter by. The lack of alarm from the oblivious bystanders typically puts those on alert at ease, and I have even seen a flock ignore the panicked "puts" of those who have me pegged.

The fall turkey season in Oregon's Northeast hunting units is in full swing and runs through Jan. 31, 2022, on private lands. One turkey of either sex can be harvested. If you are looking for something new and exciting and have never tried spot-and-stalk turkey hunting, get out and give it a shot. You are guaranteed to enjoy the challenge, and fall quickly in love with the Rio's rich hues of copper, emerald, and auburn, the tail fan tipped with an elegant caramel band, and the exceptional table fare of this beautiful wild turkey.

Brad Trumbo is a fish and wildlife biologist and outdoor writer in Waitsburg, Washington. For tips and tales of outdoor pursuits and conservation, visit www.bradtrumbo.com.

Group gives update on trail work

By **BILL BRADSHAW**

Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — A regional trails maintenance group received a positive response after an update on their activities to the Wallowa County Board of Commissioners at the board's meeting Wednesday, Dec. 1.

"The trails association has a mission to maintain trails and conserve heritage sites in Northeast Oregon," said Rick Bombaci, director of the Wallowa Mountains Hells Canyon Trails Association. "It began in 2016 in a partnership that was composed of Eastern Oregon University, Wallowa Resources and the Forest Service and this, as yet, unformed organization, and the trails association became the fourth leg of that stool. We had meetings at Cloud 9 for about a year over lunch ... in 2017, we actually started doing work in the field. We are incorporated as a 501(c)(3)."

Since that field work started, the trails group has had 747 volunteers working 11,277 hours in the field. They've cleared 479 miles of trails, brushed 159 miles of trails and assessed another 212 miles. They have removed nearly 3,500 trees, manufactured 44 trail signs, installed 24 of those signs, repaired three bridges and had six work sessions on historic sites.

Bombaci said those statistics are required to be kept by the group for the U.S. Forest Service since that agency is the primary source of its funding.

He described the partnership through which the trails group works and receives its annual budget of about \$30,000. He said the group receives that funding



Wallowa County Chieftain, File

Wallowa Mountain Hells Canyon Trails Association volunteer David Cook carries a 4-by-4 across the Wallowa River en route to a new one-log bridge that the group helped the Forest Service construct across BC Creek.

from the Forest Service; private foundations and other organizations, such as Cycle Oregon, the Eastern Oregon Visitors Association, Travel Oregon, the Wild-horse Foundation and the Oregon Hunters Association. Other government money comes from the National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance and directly from Wallowa County.

Volunteers and outreach

The group has had volunteer workers from Eastern Oregon University, the University of Idaho, Trailkeepers of Oregon and Wallowa County Community Corrections which has sent work crews doing community service.

Commission Chairman Todd Nash expressed his appreciation on behalf of the board after the presentation.

"We certainly appreciate the work your group has done," Nash said.

He also pointed out that Sage DeLong, a new field representative for U.S. Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Oregon, was visiting at the

meeting and urged Bombaci to make Bentz aware of any of the group's needs through DeLong for "largest wilderness in the state of Oregon." Nash also urged Bombaci to continue to make the commissioners aware of any way the county can assist the group.

"We're making a difference," Bombaci said. "The Forest Service hasn't been able to field more than about three people per trail crew for the past decade or so. There's no way they can keep up with more than 1,200 miles of trails. We've probably doubled or tripled the amount of work that's getting done. ... But that still isn't enough to keep up."

In his presentation, Bombaci updated the commissioners on the trails group's status.

"Currently we have two part-time staff, that's me and Asch," he said, introducing co-worker Asch Humphrey. "I work out of an office at Wallowa Resources. The organization initially was active just in Wallowa County, but we have been expanding and now we have just about as much

activity in Union County as we do in Wallowa County."

He said the group also is beginning to make contacts in Baker County.

"But right now, we're taking things slow and trying to make sure we have a good volunteer base in Union and Wallowa counties first," he said. "Right now, we have about 125 paying members. More or less half of them are in Wallowa County, a quarter of them are in Union County and the rest are scattered all over the place around the state and the Northwest. It's mostly people over 50. ... I'd say the average age of our volunteers is someplace in the 60-year-old range. We have a pretty even split, almost exactly 50-50 male-female so there's a lot of participation out there."

The group has supporters far beyond the active volunteers.

"We have an email list of about 450 folks," Bombaci said. "A portion of them are active. Many of them are just 'window-shoppers' who are following along and cheering us on."

Social media also provides support, he said, introducing Humphrey as the group's social media outreach specialist.

"I've been working on social media over the past year and one reason is that we've been trying to bring some folks into our organization so we can continue to grow," Humphrey said. "It's been neat to see how having a regular presence on Facebook and Instagram and also our website so we can do updates ourselves. We've also been able to create online forms for projects."

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