

Alligator Adventure ...

By Jeff McDaniel

My desire to seek adventures different or "out of the ordinary" took me to a secluded place far at the southern corner of the State of Georgia. It was there, time seemingly stood still. As we drove downhill toward our destination, a peace or calming was ever present. The woes of my daily life and the head aches of works were forgotten. The Marina was a throw back to a life style from my childhood. The place was Wingates Lunger Lodge on Lake Seminole. It was nestled far off the beaten path amongst the pine trees, love-bugs, ants, and mosquitoes. Bugs, Bass, and alligators out numbered the people easily 1000 to one. It was beautiful.

The Lodge and marina was the focal point, but the cabins scattered through out provided seclusion and that rustic ambience that so important to an outdoor get away. Though Wingate's promotes the fishing as their primary focus, I was there for a little bigger size sport. In my third attempt, I was successful in drawing my 2008 Alligator tag. I was very lucky to be selected in 2008, as I was expecting not to draw until 2009 or even 2010. With the news, I was off and running formulating my plans.

In my research, I came across a gentleman by the name of Phil Walters. Any web search using Phil Walters and the word alligator will produce many results. It didn't take me long to conclude Phil or www.gatorguide.com was the expert I needed. In talking with Phil, I knew his advice was solid, true, and would lead me to the experience that I was seeking.

Moving forward, I checked into my cabin. It was a humble brick building that provided all the comforts any sportsmen would need. After the meet and greet session was over, the gator team

was ready to tackle the challenge at hand. In our party were these find men: Capt. Phil Walters from gatorguide.com, Steve Deibler and David Simmons from Deibler Outdoors TV, and Randy Pounds the chase boat driver and my personal boat partner. This group of five embarked on the task of filming the gator hunt using two boats, two cameras and two well equipped and skilled pilots. We left the marina with the sun setting in the western tree tops. As darkness swallowed up the light, the lake took on a whole new look. The sounds of the lake began to echo from all points of the lake. Frogs, bugs, and loons all sang their poetic verses over and over into the night. As we scanned the lake with lights, searching for the red eyes ... it was quite apparent we weren't alone. At any given time, from any angle, the eyes were upon us. Alligators by the dozens were abundant. It was an unusual feeling knowing we were being watched by so many creatures that could easily have us for lunch. Our plan was simple, Phil would spot the gators, and estimate the size. We were looking for trophy class gators. A trophy is any gator going 10 feet long and hopefully longer. Capt. Phil would navigate the Air Boat into position for David Simmons or me to land a restraining line. The State of Georgia requires the hunters to place a line by means of a Cross Bow, Compound Bow, and a hand thrown harpoon. Once the Alligator is attached to a restraining line, the hunter then can pull boat side and dispatch with a pistol or "bang" stick. Capt. Phil promotes the use of harpoons only with big gators. I for one believe in Phil's advice. As the evening progressed, I found myself in the position to step up and get in the action. We had a nice alligator between the boats. Even though David was the hunter in line to be filmed, the gator had other ideas. With all hunting, opportunities happen and taking advantage of what's presented sometime rewrites the script we set in motion prior. With that said, this alligator seeming wanted our boat to harvest him. We ran up upon the exposed swimming gator and as he fled, I

threw my first ever attempt with a "Ratworks" harpoon by gatorguides.com at the dark object racing away. The harpoon seemed to hit the area, but I really had no clue if I was successful. The water slashes, the harpoon disappears into the dark murky waters and the line slides from the boat. Randy Pounds, a Georgia native sportsman grabs the rope and creates resistance. With excitement unable to describe in mere words, Randy reports that I indeed landed the dart with restraining line. I was taken back with the report. I was excited beyond belief. My first throw hit a 10 foot prehistoric creature. The fun was just beginning. The alligator knowing he now was the target retreated deep into the vegetation and dark waters. The power at the end of the rope was unbelievable. This awesome and powerful creature was hooked with a simple dart and rope pulling our boat at will. We allowed the gator to run, while staying close holding his leash. Capt. Phil gave the nod to pull him up. We did and I applied another dart with line for insurance. Phil also promotes with "big" gators, attaching a second line is a must. We knew we had a big one and I nor the rest of our team wanted this trophy to pull out. The second dart sent the gator running again.

Now, with two lines and a gator getting tired, Capt. Phil again gave the nod to pull him up. Phil, with all his experience, gives the gator the respect he deserves. Phil knows the dangers with this sport and takes every safety precaution needed to ensure the entire team is out of harms way. Phil takes his gaff and hooks the gator. To Phil's surprise, the gator had plenty of fight left. With a few lunges, and bites at the boat or us, the gator promptly snaps the hook off the gaff. Randy Pounds quickly hands Phil his, and the gator is again hooked and brought into position to dispatch. After I applied the final act to harvest this awesome trophy, a sigh of relief come over me. The hunt was over, but the quest too was complete. I experienced an adrenalin rush like no other. Coming face to face with a creature larger

than me with teeth and claws capable of dismembering me is a hunt like no other.

If anyone is seeking a hunt that encompasses excitement, big game, and danger look no further. Alligator hunting at night using a throw harpoon will test your nerves and send chills up your spine. The words can not describe the excitement. I must give a huge thank you to Phil Walters, Randy Pounds, Steve Deibler, and David Simmons. These guys were great. Without their help, advice, and assistance, my hunt would not have ended with such results.

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Thanks to these fine people

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Randy Pounds - DEP
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