

INTRODUCING
A NEW SERIES

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF AUTHOR



TRAVELING HUNTER

HAVE TAG WILL TRAVEL

FAR HORIZONS



Surveys consistently reveal the majority of American sportsmen and women rarely, if ever, travel out of their home states to hunt. Culturally, and not just in the U.S., most hunters worldwide pursue the game most accessible and available close to home. I am not among this majority and haven't been since I was young.

This is not altogether my parents' fault. Dad was a good Kansas quail hunter because, in his day, bobwhite quail were what we had, in abundance, close to home. Sure, once in a while he would make a foray out West (western Kansas, that is), to hunt pheasants. He went up to South Dakota a few times, but that could have been the extent of his hunting travels... until I came along.

For the largest number of American hunters today, the whitetail deer is the most available game. Many whitetail states have long seasons and generous bag limits, so I get why many modern deer hunters don't travel. Why would you when you have a hunting paradise in your backyard?

The Kansas I grew up in had no deer season until I was a teenager. Our family had good shotguns, but I'm pretty sure Dad never fired a centerfire rifle until I got interested. Dad flew an F6F in the Pacific but never touched a service rifle. In training, they shot skeet all they wanted for aerial gunnery practice.

Pop was as fast and deadly on quail and pheasants as anyone I've ever seen. In time, he became competent with a rifle but never confident. The rifle just wasn't his tool.

ORIGINS OF THE ITCH

So, where did I get the wanderlust? Honestly, I'm not sure. My mom's brother Arthur C. Popham Jr. (1915-2009) was my uncle. Like all good Midwesterners, Uncle

Art was a shotgun guy, but he was the rarity, also a rifleman. Art was a long-time stalwart member of Boone and Crockett; he proposed my Professional membership some 40 years ago.

Art Popham was also an accomplished big-game hunter. He attended college at the University of Arizona, where Jack O'Connor was his English professor. They hunted desert sheep together in Sonora in August of 1936 and remained friends; O'Connor was godfather to my only male cousin, the late Art III. I do not claim to have known O'Connor well, but he was always out there, almost as a family deity.

Uncle Art was one of the early guys to take all four North American wild sheep, and in 1956, he hunted in



ABOVE LEFT: Art Popham with a fine Cape buffalo, taken in Tanganyika in 1956. Although Boddington hunted little with his uncle, he was a huge influence. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Although Jack O'Connor was a family friend, Boddington didn't really know him growing up. Doesn't matter, he gives O'Connor's stories much credit for his lifelong wanderlust.



OPPOSITE: Boddington and his uncle, Art Popham, quail hunting in Kansas, when Boddington was about 16.

Tanganyika. I was a precocious four-year-old; I knew lions and elephants lived in Africa, but I had no idea where Tanganyika was. No matter, I vowed I would do that someday. Twenty years later I made that dream come true.

In the corner of his den, Art had a smallish buck that I understood was a Coues' whitetail, taken in Arizona with the great George Parker. Early on, hunting Coues' deer ranked high on my dream list. As a youngster, I even had the audacity to believe it was almost part of my birthright to take all four sheep. Uncle Art was still alive when I finally got it done—30 years after my first ram.

On the surface, it seems logical that I got it from Uncle Art. It's not that simple. Families often aren't. I have never written of this before, but to kick off this series in our *Fair Chase* magazine, I think it's best to tell the truth. I revered my dad and worshipped Uncle Art

from afar. The unvarnished truth is Dad and Art didn't get along. To his credit, Dad ensured I knew nothing about this friction until I was long grown.

That's all I will say, except that I have no memories of hunting big game with my uncle because we never did. As a teenager, he took me bird hunting a couple of times. At Kansas University, I had an awesome bird dog and took Uncle Art several times. But, contrary to B&C lore, the connection was not as rich as it might have been.

EARLY TRAVELS

So, I put it more to devouring Jack O'Connor's column, first read in every *Outdoor Life* that arrived. And, to an awesome dad, Edward M. "Bud" Boddington Jr., who I appreciate more with every passing year. We had no deer season, and I wanted to hunt big game. So, in the mid-1960s, as I was (barely) legal, Dad and I started traveling. We went to Wyoming for pronghorn



With Arizona outfitters Marvin and Warner Glenn, Boddington helps load his first Coues' whitetail on one of the Glenns' famous riding mules, 1978. It was O'Connor's and his uncle's tales of hunting desert deer that fueled Boddington's dreams of hunting them.



Boddington's big-game experience was hunting pronghorns in Wyoming with his dad.

ABOVE LEFT: Boddington's early deer hunting was all mule deer. This North Carolina buck, taken with hounds, was his first whitetail, taken in 1974 on a long weekend away from the Marine Corps Basic School at Quantico, Virginia. ABOVE RIGHT: When his Uncle Art went to Tanganyika in 1956, four-year-old Boddington vowed he'd do that someday. In 1977, not yet 25, Boddington made his first safari. In camp under Mount Kenya with PH Willem van Dyk.

LEFT: Craig and his dad, "Bud" Boddington Jr., at the end of a great day in northeast Kansas. Kansas had no deer season until Boddington was a teenager, but bobwhite quail were abundant, often with the occasional rooster pheasant added.

and mule deer and to Colorado. We had to drive hundreds of miles from eastern Kansas to get into game country. It didn't seem so daunting to get on an airplane.

Looking back, I still find it amazing that I was that obsessed. In 1972, looking ahead to Thanksgiving break at KU, I contacted Jack Atcheson, Sr. and booked an elk hunt with John Ward out of Sheridan, Montana. My folks were skeptical and not financing. I had some trap shooting winnings from a great day at the Grand American Handicap. At 20, nothing was more important than going hunting. So I went.

It was a tough hunt. Actually, embarrassing. My only experience was pronghorn and mule deer in open country. In black timber, I was clueless. Somehow, I got

a nice 5x5 on Thanksgiving Day, 1972. Not correct to say this was when I got hooked. I was already lost forever and still am.

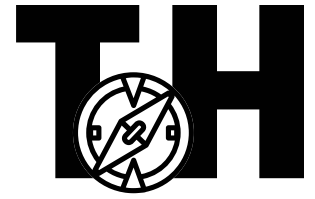
Robert Ruark (1915-1965) was perhaps North Carolina's best-known writer and certainly a far-better scribe than anyone will ever categorize me. However, there are parallels. Robert Ruark was a Southern quail hunter, with no experience with a rifle. In 1952 (the year I was born), Ruark went on safari in East Africa, giving us one of the best "first safari" books. Within *Horn of the Hunter*, and yielding the book's title, is Ruark's most timeless quote: "The horn of the hunter sounds early for some, later for others...."

I was likely in my mother's womb when Ruark wrote that. It doesn't matter;

the horn had probably already sounded for me. So, I genuinely don't know where it came from, but from an early age I have been compelled to crest the far horizons.

I do not suggest you should envy me. I envy folks like my grandfather, a content and avid Kansas bird hunter. "Grandy" went beyond the surveys. In later life, he'd start in South Dakota, work south to Nebraska, and finish up in Kansas. As far as is known, he never fired a rifle. Times change. And, with management, wildlife changes.

It's not a bad thing to be content with what you have. And to become adept at hunting what you have. This is not about good, better, or best. Today, most American hunters are whitetail deer hunters. It doesn't matter if they never hunt beyond their



How does someone get the bug to travel and hunt? Is it wanderlust? Family tradition? Or something else entirely?



ABOVE: For his annual Kansas buck, Boddington looks for older, downhill, or “weird.” This mature seven-point was known and on the “hit list.” The buck showed on the next-to-last morning of the season; Boddington was thrilled! **LEFT:** In time, Boddington’s dad became extremely competent with a rifle, but he was never confident, always first and foremost a shotgunner. The elder Boddington took this mule deer in Montana’s Missouri Breaks.



home county lines. If they successfully hunt their own backyard deer, they are good hunters. Suppose they hunt east of the Mississippi, where our whitetail deer are now numerous but also the wildest, wariest, and most hunter-educated game animals on Earth. In that case, if they achieve some success on mature bucks, they are among the most skilled human hunters on Earth.

Remember, again, that I grew up absent the deer camp traditions that define so many of us as hunters. In the 1970s, when I got started, the cult, culture, and industry of whitetail hunting were also just getting started.

TRAVELING FOR GAME... WHY?

Let me tell you about my first whitetail, which says much about me for good or bad. In 1974, I was at The Basic School

for newly-minted Marine officers at Quantico, Virginia, looking ahead to November deer season. We had a long weekend on the October schedule. Somehow, in those pre-internet days, I figured out the North Carolina deer season was open, and I followed up a “where-to-go” ad to a place near Lake Mattamuskeet. While my fellow lieutenants were carousing in Georgetown, convinced I was nuts (probably correct), I drove south and experienced my first (and still only) hound hunt for whitetails.

The houndsmen scoffed at my .270 and offered me a shotgun with buckshot. I hung onto the rifle. As directed, I took a stand on a levee. Mid-morning, I heard the dogs turn my way, saw the flash of antlers in the swamp, and shot the buck mid-leap as he tried to clear the dike. Heck, I thought it was a giant. So did

the local folks. With 14 measurable points, it was an amazing buck for that time and place. In retrospect, it was a long-odds, foolish gamble. I wanted to hunt, and North Carolina wasn’t so far from northern Virginia, was it?

I am a traveling hunter. I can’t help it. It’s too late to change. I’ve traveled to all the hunting continents and hunted in 56 countries. Not sure how many U.S. states, Canadian provinces, and Mexican states. Many, but not all. Call me fortunate, but I am also obsessed. Both are accurate. However, let me be clear: I get no greater pleasure anywhere in the world than taking a whitetail buck on my Kansas farm, all by myself. The only thing better is when one of my hunters takes a nice buck, which will almost invariably be bigger than mine.

My buck is almost always a “cull,” a management buck. Hey, it’s a short season, and hunters in the field can’t compete with guests. So, I pass some dandies. It doesn’t matter. When I see a nasty old

or weird buck I think needs to go, my pulse rate quickens, and my hands start to shake—as if it was the 180-plus giant I imagine it to be.

As a traveling hunter, much of my hunting has been guided, whether by law or convenience. There is no shame in that. Daniel Boone, David Crockett, Theodore Roosevelt, and even Frederick Selous engaged local guides. I have turned the tables and guided in various places and often hunted unguided where legal. It’s more satisfying, for sure, but not always practical.

There is nothing better in the hunting world than taking a fine animal all by yourself, which is another reason why most American hunters hunt close to home. But, if you dream of seeing a new country and hunting unfamiliar game, this series is intended to fuel those dreams. With thirst unquenched, I continue to seek far horizons and assume that I will, as long as possible. I am now 70, but my hunter’s horn sounds strong as ever! ■