

JJ REICH

THE REICH STUFF*Waterfowl paradise is pronounced Edmonton, Alberta*

JJ's eight-man hunting group complete with guide, dog and 64-bird limit. (JJ Reich)

Edmonton, Alberta has long been renowned as a duck and goose hunter's paradise. For those of us reared as Badgers, too often familiar with playing the waiting game in the marshes of Wisconsin, the stark difference just in the number of birds seen makes this Canadian trip a rare experience indeed.

Not only did I witness unimaginable shooting opportunities, there were also hot barrels, good camaraderie, great retrievers, tasty dishes, new firearms products, cabin walls adorned with eight-man limits, and...one funny guide surely cut from the mold of Rodney Dangerfield.

In this adventure I met up with Scott Grange from Browning, Jonathan Harling from Winchester Ammunition,

and Kevin Howard from Mossy Oak, along with four other outdoor writers for early-October duck and goose hunting. The eight of us were guests at Dog 'N Duck Outfitting, 80 miles north-east of Edmonton, Alberta. Three company reps showed us a few new products for 2009 in action. (Note: be sure to check out "Product 6-Pack" in future issues of OWO to get the scoop on some I tried during this hunt.)

During the course of two-and-a-half days, we had three morning hunts and two afternoon hunts. Despite the bright clear skies and unseasonably hot, 80-degree weather, (century-old, early-October records for warm weather were shattered while we were there), we did pretty well.

On the opening morning's honker hunt, I took my first-ever "specklebelly" goose, with the eight of us ending up with almost two dozen geese and a half-dozen ducks. The hunt was done in a feed pea field using some unique stand-up blinds. The blinds were made of collapsible, hinged fencing that was completely brushed in and surrounded by a mix of both full-body and silhouette decoys. Think of them as above-ground pit

blinds. We sat on five-gallon buckets and stood up to shoot. The waterfowl certainly flew comfortably into the set-up, ignoring the three-foot structures.

On the second morning's duck hunt, all eight of us at camp hunted together in a different grain field using the same stand-up blind set-up. We had an unbelievable morning by limiting out with 64 ducks in just 53 minutes. We then spent an hour watching hundreds of other ducks continue to land into our decoys while we took in-your-face photos of the ducks and got some great video footage.

On the last morning, we split up into smaller groups for more duck hunting. This time we set up over water on one of the many prairie potholes available to Dog 'N Duck. My foursome capped our limit of 32 ducks in less than 43 minutes, with one huge mallard boxed for me to take home and mount on the wall.

The hot afternoons proved unproductive, yet relaxing. We saw both ducks and geese by the thousands in the air, but only a handful worked with us and came down.

Going on far-from-home hunts is always fun because you often see beautiful scenery, new-to-you wildlife species and interesting people. But every once in a while, you'll meet a true character -- someone everyone at camp remembers long after the gear is unpacked and cleaned.

Meet Spoonbill Bob. Think of him as a 70-something, Canadian version of Rodney Dangerfield. His self-degrading jokes, R-rated one-liners, and constant wisecracks kept us rolling our eyes and chuckling in the duck blind. "Why do they call you Spoonbill Bob?" I asked Bob during the first night at camp. "Spoonbills are horrible ducks... and I am a horrible man," he replied with a smirk and a wink.

The Spoonbill Lounge was my favorite building on the property. It's a wood-stove-heated shack named in honor of the "horrible" guide. It's dotted with comfortable chairs and a poker table, and decorated with antique game calls, beer signs, knick-knacks, and mounted trophies that many years of satisfied, return-visit guests donated.

Every hunter staying at Dog 'N Duck has to sign the walls of the Spoonbill Lounge with permanent marker before leaving. Some of the guests add humor to the walls by writing down one-liners (AKA Spoonisms) they heard him spout during their hunt. Some prime examples include:




JJ Reich with his Alberta limit of pintails and mallards. (JJ Reich)



J.J. holding huge Canada and white-fronted geese. (JJ Reich)

"My ex-wife was an excellent housekeeper.... She kept the house!" And, "I came into this world with nothing, and it looks like I'll go out with most of it left." Meeting Spoonie certainly was a humorous highlight of my Alberta trip.

Learn more about the outfitter at: www.dognduck.ca. If you've never spent some fall harvest days in Canada getting up close and personal with wild waterfowl, then you must put it on your bucket list. 

JJ Reich is an outdoor writer who contributes product-related articles to several national magazines and websites. He is also the author of *Kampp Tales Outdoor Adventures* hunting books for kids. Learn more at www.kampptales.com.



Stand-up blinds used in Alberta's grain fields. (JJ Reich)