

# back cast



By Ron Wilson

I've never done this before and feel a little silly about it. I should pull farther down the prairie trail to make myself less noticeable in the event someone does drive over the hill.

I'm sitting in a collapsible camping chair with my feet propped on a cooler and my laptop sitting on my lap. Even though I feel wholly incongruous tapping on computer keys in this setting, the view sure beats the one out my office windows, so I think I can get over it. Plus, from right here, I can walk in any direction, which I did for about three hours before unfolding the chair, and hunt land open to the public.

I threw the computer in my pickup next to a shotgun before leaving the house at daylight, thinking that even though I was trading a day of work for a day of bird hunting, I could maybe get something accomplished. Then again, there was a part of me that hoped the battery was dead, but such wasn't the case when I pressed the tiny silver button above the F8 key and the green light came on.

I fish with a good friend every summer who, when he's not looking for rising trout, is searching for cell phone coverage in an attempt to keep his business up and running from long distance. I feel for the guy, but give him unlimited grief because he's such an easy target and it's more fun than taking his side. From what little I hear and understand from his business conversations, there's typically a considerable amount of money involved, someone is invariably dragging their feet, and things could get ugly down the road if the feet-dragging doesn't stop. Sometimes there's shouting. Most times there's not.

Anyway, he'd get a kick out of seeing me here typing away instead of chasing birds. He'd say that what I'm doing is no different, and he might be right. Then again, I can push the tiny silver button above the F8 key at any time, walk away, and not worry about a business deal falling through. Worst case scenario is that when I do finally stand from my chair, I get lightheaded, stumble, drop the laptop on a rock and crack the monitor.

My dogs, Merle, 4, and Ollie, 10 months, are sacked in their travel kennels, hopefully gaining second winds because the day isn't over. I made three sandwiches (smoked ham and cheese rolled in flour tortillas) on the tailgate and we all got an even share. They inhaled their lunch, of course, knowing that if they hurried, odds were good I'd share my last two bites.

And I did.

Up until today, lunch on the tailgate is about the only thing Ollie has given much notice on our hunting trips. He's young; I know this, so I don't expect much, other than staying close and coming when I call. Much of the time, he doesn't even have to do the latter as he prefers to walk in the trail that I've broken where the vegetation gets too thick. I'm forever kicking him accidentally with the heels of my boots because he follows so closely. While it doesn't seem to bother him, I can't help but flinch a little when I clip him under the chin and I hear his teeth go together.

Earlier this morning while Merle was on point on the south side of a single row of trees, Ollie waded into the mix and maybe a half-dozen pheasants flushed in all directions. I whiffed twice on a rooster going left to right, and then couldn't maneuver quickly enough to the other side of a tree to identify the bird that held the longest and flushed last.

It happened all of a sudden, like it often does, that I couldn't really tell if what I just witnessed was Ollie's first legitimate flush or just dumb luck. Did he bumble into the birds, or was he lured in by a scent so consuming that smoked ham and cheese rolled in a flour tortilla would now be his second favorite part of these outings.

Since I missed, since I booted two gimme shots on a bird that, at least for me, would have marked a step in Ollie's evolution from sock chewer to bird dog, I'm going with bumbled.



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