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NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2010



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by
TOM STEPHENSON

Kowiki LODGE

Where the sport of quail
hunting lives on.

AS A LITTLE BOY, PHIL CULBERSON HUNTED QUAIL along the train tracks of Central Georgia carrying his Winchester model 42 .410. The birds were plentiful then, and the coveys gathered at bumpier parts of the track where the dribbled grains from speeding hoppers generated easy bobwhite meals.

In time, rural land prices skyrocketed, and the resulting smaller properties didn't farm much. The remaining big farms

practiced new "clean practices" and the full-grown veteran of the Vietnam War, Culberson, and his faithful English pointer, Trailer, joined the chase of the birds into South Georgia. Far too soon the "bob-bob-white" whistle grew faint even there, once the "quail capital of the world."

From 1966 to 1998, Georgia experienced a 70% decline in overall quail population. The glory days of the early '60s when some 135,000 hunters harvested up to four million birds gave way to fancy "plantations" sporting pen-raised varieties.

At about this same time, Culberson found time to occasionally leave his booming real estate development company for dove hunting soirees in Central Texas. "I guess the land and the state just really grew on me," Culberson says. "Of course seeing wild quail in about every field we dove hunted did not hurt a thing either."

Phil Culberson is a consummate Georgia gentleman. When he decided to buy land in the Coleman, Texas area, he went first-class and imported much from Georgia, including breathtaking art and game mounts he had collected over the years. There were also the fine Llewellyn setters that would need to acclimate to a harsher environment, a living room and expansive patio designed to facilitate the southern art of story telling and the strict hunting ethics Culberson practiced his entire life. But mostly he was importing a dream.



Kowiki Lodge's interior sports mostly leather seating, an antler-chandelier, oversized rock fireplace and taxidermy replaying action scenes from the wild.



The whistle of the bobwhite remains strong on this lodge named for the Creek Indian word meaning quail.

"I dreamed that I shot an arrow from Georgia," says the 65-year-old Georgian. "That arrow landed in Texas and busted a covey of wild quail. And that's how I came up with the lodge logo."

Culberson's dream lodge came to be known as "Kowiki," from a Georgia Creek Indian term for quail. It is perched magnificently on a one-mile bluff overlooking a 50-acre lake. The inside is sculpted in masculine beauty featuring a roaring oversized fireplace, deep leather chairs, two bunkrooms that comfortably sleep 24 hunters, a downstairs game room with full-sized pool tables, kegs of beer, dart boards and poker tables. Outside are more man toys including clay target shooting and a putting green. Along the short walk to the smaller more private lodge—the four-bedroom covey—are state-of-the-art dog kennels housing classy pointers, setters and retrievers.

The lodge sits on 600 acres, all manicured for quail and featuring some of the finest bass fishing for miles. Just four years ago, the hit outdoors show, "Cabela's Outfitter Journal", asked Culberson if they could film for several days on his land while producing a television segment on "Wild Texas Quail." After just a day and a half, the show's producer told Culberson that his entire crew was leaving early, "because

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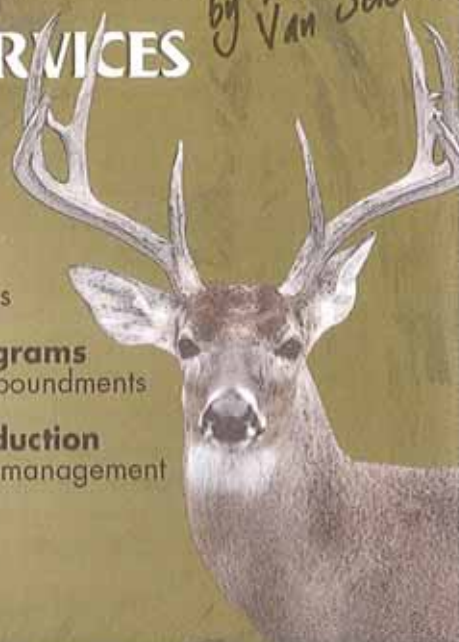
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we already have more than 20 coveys pointed, great dog work and enough to fill a two-hour show."

After the show aired, the quail hunting spots at Kowiki for the next season sold out. Unfortunately, the quail population in almost the entire state crashed. So now, what would a Georgia gentleman do? "I did the only thing I could do," Culberson says. "I sent everybody their deposit money back and imposed a moratorium on hunting birds at my place and on all my leases." (Kowiki leases several thousand acres for hunting each year.)

The wild birds have made a slow but steady comeback while Kowiki has introduced the planting of flight-conditioned birds on Kowiki lease property and also experimented with surrogators. "I have done that to keep clients happy and—just as important—to keep our dogs working and happy," Culberson says.

Culberson expects the 2010-2011 season to be the last one for the general public to hunt quail at Kowiki. "We will remain wide open to the public for our great dove hunts, fishing and maybe even deer hunts," Culberson says. "But right now we are offering memberships to the seri-



The outside porch view and conversation is best enjoyed in a rocking chair with a cigar and single malt.



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ous quail hunter. I am in the process of putting together founding members who will make up our board of directors."

The Kowiki Covey will continue to offer wild bird hunts on the lodge grounds and flight-conditioned birds on the leased properties close by. "But the biggest change," Culberson says, "is that we intend to lease real crackerjack quail properties anywhere we find the birds."

Thus, Kowiki, already outfitted with top-of-the-line trailers and dog boxes, will act as a headquarters for loading dogs, handlers and other necessities to be caravanned to the club leases. The club will provide lunches during the hunt while still providing a luxurious retreat for food and drink after the hunt.

Members will be able to kennel the dogs and have them exercised year round and even entertain clients and guests at the lodge without being present. "What I am trying to do," Culberson says, "is to bring a little bit of the Georgia plantation hospitality to Texas while continuing the emphasis on wild birds."

When you think about it ... it sounds just like a dream come true. ♦



Quail hunters (and their wives) sometime prefer one of Kowiki's six private and professionally adorned bedrooms.

IF YOU GO...

Kowiki Lodge will be offering wing-shooting packages, including the second dove season until April 1. The pheasant and quail packages start as low as \$325. Kowiki also caters to family reunions, weddings and father/son/daughter fishing trips on all of the three stocked lakes. Jonboats with trolling motor are provided.

For more information about hunt packages or how to apply for club membership:

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KO-WI-KI - Creek Indian meaning **QUAIL**

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