

Outdoors

Great Southern Outdoors opens Pritchett's

Rex Pritchett knows "Co-colas" and he knows life in the arguably the best hunting area in Alabama — Bullock County in the heart of the Black Belt.

After 21 years with Coca-Cola, Pritchett recently turned all his focus on the outdoors and the land his family has owned since the 1800s.

Pritchett and partner Wayne Green combined two of the county's oldest plantations into Great Southern Outdoors, a wildlife plantation that opened to the public this fall. The operation is located 28 miles south of Montgomery, near Union Springs.

"I've hunted since I was a child," Pritchett said. "While I was with Coca-Cola, I met a lot of people who never had been outdoors. That was just unreal that people had never been hunting or fishing.

"After I retired from Coca-Cola, I decided to live the rest of my life in the outdoors. I love the outdoors. I don't even like to cut down a tree."

Pritchett decided the best way to relate that passion for the outdoors was to open his world to the public.

"I really enjoy meeting people and I wanted them to see what I've experienced in my lifetime outdoors," he said.

The Green family's Black Creek Plantation and the Pritchett family's Bughall Creek Plantation make up Great Southern Outdoors, 3,200 acres of prime wildlife habitat.

Pritchett said Bughall Creek Plantation was established in 1823 and used for cattle, row crops and farming operations until 1994, when pines were planted.

Minimal hunting pressure

"What helps our plantation is there are four or five landowners arounds with large tracts of land," he said. "And they don't have any hunting.

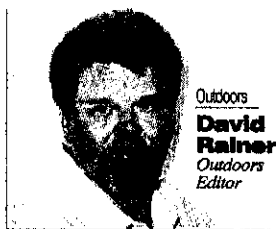
"Fourteen years ago, we started our own management program. We used two weekends to take our does, about 40 each weekend. We did that for six years, until we learned about the state's DMP (Deer Management Program). We've been on that for eight years. The biologist comes and tells us what to plant and tells us how many does to take.

"We couldn't have opened up if we hadn't done that. We've gotten to point that now the biologists tell us what size bucks to take. And we cull certain bucks."

Pritchett said the largest buck ever taken on the plantation scored 177 5/8 Boone and Crockett points.

Because land use has changed dramatically in recent years with row crops giving way to pines, the plantation has a supplemental feeding program.

"We've fed 28 tons since February," Pritchett said. "That's 65 percent soybeans and 35 percent corn. We want to try to grow bucks as close to the state record as we can. And most people in Alabama know that there are a lot



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of big bucks in Bullock County."

Selective shooting

That's why Pritchett and Green want their customers to be selective during deer season.

"Being our first year, people need to pay attention to what kind of buck they want," Pritchett said. "They don't need to shoot the first buck they see. We hope they'll wait for an eight-point with at least a 15-inch spread.

"In the last six or seven years, probably 65 percent of the clubs in Bullock County have gone to eight-point-or-better rules."

Pritchett plans to book a minimum number of hunters the first season, which allows him to send every hunter out with a guide.

"We're going to do one-on-one guides," he said. "The guides will stay with them, if that's what the customer wants, and work with them to find them a quality buck. There won't be any of that stopping the truck and pointing the hunter toward the stand.

"If the customer wants, the guide can even film the hunt with one of the two small camcorders we have at the lodge."

Entertainment options

Pritchett said he wants hunters to have plenty of entertainment options during their stay at Great Southern Outdoors.

"This is not going to be your same old plantation, where you deer hunt and that's it," he said. "We've got a skeet range and you can go fishing. We want them to be busy if that's what they want.

"Of course, if you want to deer hunt early, come in and take and a nap and then go back out in the afternoon, that's fine, too."

The plantation has two lakes, a 15-acre body of water with bass, bream and catfish, and a 123-acre lake with bass, crappie, bream and catfish.

The plantation also has plenty of feral hogs to hunt during or after deer season. Plus, an abundance of Eastern wild turkeys inhabit the fertile land.

Of course, home-cooked meals are served in generous portions in the 3,800-square-foot Plantation Activity Center.

"We make sure you don't go hungry," Pritchett said. "And we'll have plenty of Cokes, too."

Rates are \$1,200 for a three-day gun deer hunt, \$975 for a three-day bow hunt, \$900 for a three-day turkey hunt, and \$1,000 for a four-day hog hunt, offered February through September.

For information, log on to www.greatsouthernoutdoors.com or call (334) 738-5066.

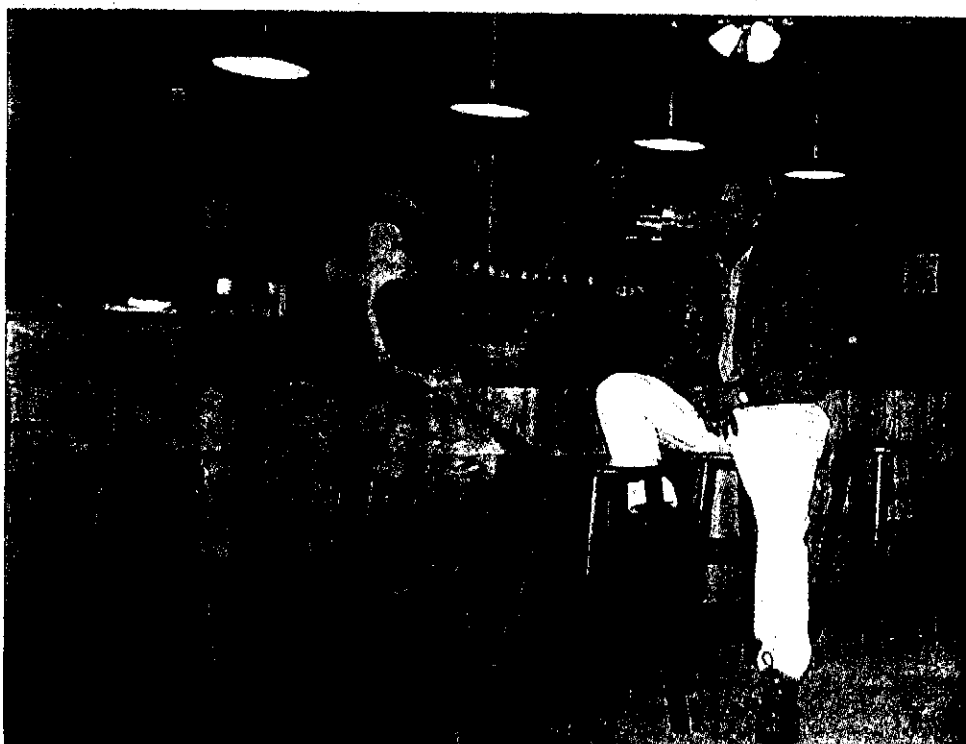


DAVID RAINER/Outdoors Editor

Doug Houston of Mobile took this feral hog on a recent trip to Great Southern Outdoors, located in Bullock County.



Al Hubbard of Pensacola admires one caught in the plantation's 15-acre lake.



Rex Pritchett, right, and Al Hubbard take a break in the Liar's Den at Great Southern Outdoors, a wildlife plantation 28 miles south of Montgomery near Union Springs.