

Young Men and Alligators

As told by Capt. Ron

A 12-foot gator exploding out of the swamps of Louisiana with deadly piercing green eyes, bellowing like the devil, slamming its jaws, lined with razor sharp, 3-inch teeth, that close with 2000 pounds per square inch pressure, would scare the shit out of most boys. And I'm not sure that in their nighttime prayers they don't mention and "God please keep me safe from the gators."



The business end of a 10' gator



Trevor & Brayden



Trevor & Dane (L to R)

Last October I took my daughter, Shannon Kuiper, grandsons Dane (age 8) and Brayden (age 11), as well as my son Trevor Rismon (age 11) and our new SCI members Will Poppie and his son Billy (age 11) to Baton Rouge, Louisiana on a gator hunt of a lifetime.

There were two closures of the alligator season last fall because of the hurricanes that struck the Gulf Coast: the opening was delayed a month. These closures scrambled our arrangements and reservations, but Patty Paptic of Global Express Travel sorted out the whole mess with some very creative effort. I'd highly recommend Patty's company [800-934-9137] to anyone traveling: She gets the job done!

We all arrived at Greg Dupont's Louisiana

Hunters camp within 30 minutes of each other. The Kuipers came from Anchorage, the Poppies from Seattle and Trevor and I from Los Angeles. Introductions were made, rifles, shotguns and handguns were unpacked and loaded, gear checked and an hour later we were flat out in swamp boats hunting gators.

When the sun set on the swamps we had all safely returned to the lodge and were savoring snapping turtle cooked Cajun style while sharing tales of the day's adventures. All the boys had shot a gator or two.

The next morning we hit the decks before dawn and like the Battle of New Orleans, "swung the guns around." Three parties left on different swamp boats for different hunting grounds. My son, Trevor, shot 7-foot and 9-foot free-swimming gators at two different locations, lifting the skull plates of both gators with a [223-caliber CZ-527 bolt action carbine with a Leopold 1 to 4 scope] at 60 and 90 yards, respectively. The guides, Travis Dardenne

and Larry Dees of Louisiana Hunters, respectfully called him “Big Gun” and asked when he learned to shoot. He proudly said at age 5.



Travis D., Trevor R., & Larry Dees Jr. and 9’ Gator

My grandsons Brayden & Dane had the Martinez brothers Mike & Clint for professional hunters – the pros are proudly known as “real coon asses.” These P.H’s gaffed a 12 –foot long gator that was heading to the bottom of the green slime-covered bayou. This colossal gator, estimated to weigh more than 800 pounds, pulled the swamp boat over 700 yards. Braydon later told his mother Shannon, “I’m a little shaky over that one.” As the gator played out exhausted he was pulled

to the surface and both boys executed the *coup de grace* with their 410 shotguns [A-Winchester model 1300 lever action and J.C. Higgins single barrel].



Dane K. and 12’ Gator

Billy Poppie and his dad Will had an equally thrilling day with the youngster bagging a 10-foot trophy gator with [45 caliber 1911 Colt automatic handgun].

That evening at Greg Dupont’s lodge we took pictures of the gators and dined on alligator gar patties with brown gravy served over rice. The boys were elated and full of hunting stories. Judge Joe Dupont & his lovely wife Betty invited the boys for a swim in their pool and to view Joe’s world-class trophy room. The Duponts always go that extra mile to make you feel welcome.



Brayden, Dane, Billy, and Trevor

(L to R)

Our third day was equally adventurous as each group took to the swamps with Greg Dupont, Larry Dees Sr., Mike & Clint Martinez, Jeff Brown & Mat Derry as guides. Once again all the boys did some fine shooting and each bagged a gator.

This was Billy Poppie’s big day: from 100 yards away, using an [open-sighted, lever-action 45-70 caliber Marlin model 1895] he slammed a 7-foot gator sunning itself on an island. This was a spectacular shot, hitting the gator right behind the eyes. A *piroque* was deployed to retrieve the reptile and Billy had his trophy.

skinned it and tacked it up to dry [see photo]



Larry D. and Billy P.
(L to R) in a Pirogue



Billy Poppie

That evening we all celebrated with a deep-fried catfish feast.

High adventure marked day four as well. That morning Brayden and Dane encountered a five-foot long copperhead sunning himself beneath a tree near the lodge. They quickly dispatched it with bamboo sticks,



Brayden and Dane
(L to R)

Meanwhile, Trevor, Billy and his dad, Will, headed out to the bayou gator grounds on two separate swamp boats. The Martinez brothers were skippering these boats. On the way, the lead boat noticed a large, floating gator and swerved to avoid colliding with the reptile. The second craft, following closely behind, was not so fortunate and hit the submerging gator. As the outboard motor caught the reptile, the prop was thrust out of the water, causing the boat to lose control, hit a log along the bank and overturn. This boat had the quad lashed to its deck so the craft settled,

bottom up with the quad underwater. The Martinez Brothers placed Trevor on the bank with his rifle to act as lookout and ward off the gator they had just hit. The Martinez Brothers then dove under the capsized boat to cut the quad loose so the craft could be righted. After considerable effort the two guides, with the help of Trevor, Will & Billy retrieved the quad, re-floated and bailed the boat, then re-packed all the gear and prepared to continue. After this harrowing experience Will Poppie feared that they would have to return to camp. “No way,” the Martinez Brothers said, “We’re going gator hunting!”



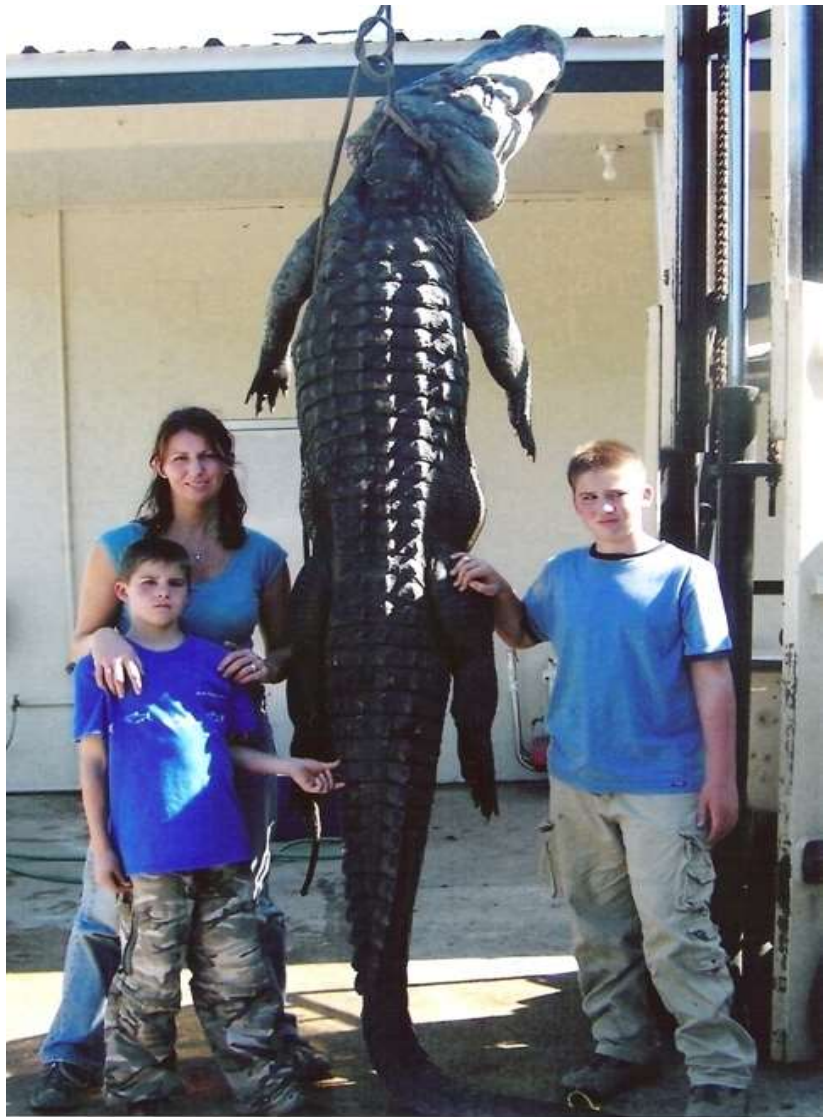
Clint Martinez
Swamp boat & Quad.

At the start of the hunt I'd taken the four boys aside and explained that they were responsible for their own actions and that advice paid off – not one of them wanted to become a gator's lunch and they all performed flawlessly. At the conclusion of day four we all departed from Baton Rouge and Lafayette for our homes in Alaska, Washington and Southern California.

In my opinion there is only one way to raise young men who will become great hunters and leaders of our nation, the United States of America, is to expose them to fishing, hunting, the out-of-doors and the reality that they are responsible for their own actions.

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Shannon, Brayden, Dane Kuiper