

Classic offers something for everyone

BY BRYAN HENDRICKS
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

Would you like some homemade fudge? How about a handcrafted, Arkansas-made longbow or some handmade, Arkansas turkey calls?

Perhaps you're in the market for an African safari, a Nebraska turkey hunt or a combination deer and pheasant hunt in Kansas. You can find it all at the Arkansas Big Buck Classic.

Joe Dabney of Mountain View runs Mankazana Safaris North America. He's the North American partner for Mankazana Safaris of South Africa, which offers guided hunts on 80,000 unfenced acres in South Africa. A former U.S. Forest Service employee, Dabney said he hunted with Mankazana a couple of times and was impressed with his outfitter's service and ethics. The game is wild and not confined, Dabney said, and the outfitter does not allow hunters to shoot game from vehicles, a practice common among many other professional hunters in Africa.

"We hit it off well, and I always enjoyed planning my own hunting trips, and I always thought it would be fun to help other people plan their hunts and maybe make a buck in the process," Dabney said.

The biggest surprise for most people, Dabney said, is how inexpensive an African safari is. The total cost, from home to South Africa, is about \$10,000, he said. According to a recent article in *Field & Stream*, that's

cheaper than hunting a single bighorn sheep in the Lower 48.

Dabney, who began his career with the Forest Service on the Oden Ranger District in 1974, is a huge advocate of the pine/bluestem restoration project in the Poteau District of the Ouachita National Forest. He said he helped write the management guidelines for the red-cockaded woodpecker, which helped form the basis for the pine/bluestem project.

For information on a Mankazana safari, call Joe or Barbara Dabney at (870) 269-3494 or visit www.mankazanasaferis.com.

Manning another booth was Betsy Schonberger, proprietor of Argos Hunts in Argentina. A native of Crystal Springs, Miss., Schonberger started Argos Hunts with her husband, a native Argentine. They offer the unlimited dove hunts for which Argentina is famous, as well as duck hunts, upland bird hunts and big-game hunts for red stag, axis deer and fallow deer.

"I'm from Mississippi, so I'm used to a small-town environment, and that's what I have now," Schonberger said. "The lifestyle suits me, and I enjoy entertaining. I get to entertain people from all over the world."

Schonberger said personal service sets Argos Hunts apart from other South American outfitters. It's a business to her, she said, but also a business that depends on making people happy. She said she got into it while watching confused, disoriented American hunters at the airport

in Buenos Aires, Argentina, trying to comprehend flight information in Spanish over the loudspeakers. Being a hospitable Southern lady, she helped them get where they needed to go. Eventually, it led her to offering the same services professionally.

"If you book a hunt with me, I will meet you at your plane, and I will take you back to your plane," Schonberger said. "If I say we're going to do something, we do it."

Argos hunts from three locations. The new lodge is on 7,500 acres, with access to 300,000 additional acres.

"We are in what they call the 'Breadbasket of South America,'" Schonberger said. "We have what they call the golden-eared dove. It's smaller than the mourning dove but larger than the white-winged dove. The reason we have so many doves is because we have so much agriculture. The climate is good, food is plentiful, and the doves nest four or five times a year, so there's no reason for them to leave."

To book a hunt with Argos Hunts, call Schonberger at (601) 983-6767 or e-mail bschonberger@argosglobal.com.

Although the Midwest has always been famous for deer hunting, it is the hottest place to go for turkey hunting these days. Nebraska is an overlooked but up-and-coming hotspot served by Bob Senter of BT Outdoors.

Based in Newport, Neb., Senter said people come from all over the country to hunt

Nebraska's gorgeous Merriams wild turkey. He said you can also get Rio Grande turkeys, as well as Rio-Merriams crosses. This is Senter's first visit to the Big Buck Classic, but based on his reception elsewhere in the South, he said he expects a good response.

"We knew it probably wouldn't be a great deer show for us because they have a lot of deer in Arkansas, but there's a lot of interest in turkeys," Senter said.

Of course, most southern states have a lot of turkeys, but we all have eastern strain birds. The Merriams, with its white barring and white-tipped tail feathers, is the most beautiful of the American wild turkeys. Even so, it ranks a distant third in Nebraska to deer and pheasant.

"Turkey hunting is not a big deal to Nebraska people, but it is to nonresidents because of the species of turkeys we have," Senter said. "That's the reason we do so many shows in the Southeast, because of the Merriams turkeys, and because we have bigger-bodied deer than you see in the Southeast."

Senter said, as did the other outfitters, that a recessed economy hasn't hurt his business.

"We haven't really seen an effect," Senter said. "We deal with such a small amount of people, but we deal with a lot of higher-end hunters, and it hasn't affected those people as much."

For information, contact Senter at (615) 585-5129 or bscars@comcast.net.