

As close as you can get

Some say simulated game can never compare to the feathered sort but a day at Bryngwyn gives Patrick Galbraith food for thought

There are sounds you never forget; sounds that take a person back to a place they visited many years before.

For me there is nothing quite as stirring as the guttural cry of a cock pheasant rising up through the tree canopy and emerging into the clear blue sky. It is a noise that evokes memories of standing on dappled frosty ground, moments before I shot my first bird.

Some weeks ago in Montgomeryshire, a uniquely beautiful part of the country, I was one of a line of Guns, standing on a peg in the hot summer sun, waiting for game of a simulated sort. There would be no such noises.

Most of you will be aware of the oft-voiced criticism from our detractors, enquiring why we

“can’t just shoot clays?”. Let’s not beat about the bush here. The reality is that it is a thousand times more satisfying to watch a grouse fold into the heather or a wigeon come down hard on the

“Birds split to the right and to the left, providing some very challenging shooting”

salting than a little black dinner plate pop into a few fragments.

I mulled this over until the keeper blew the horn for the start of the drive, whereupon I turned my gaze skyward. We were in teams

of three. I had refused to go first, so Roger Davies, a local farmer, stood at the peg. Above us on a steep bank, presumably disturbed by the trappers, a woodpigeon broke out from the side of a pine tree. Roger flinched, the reaction of a man who has spent his life out in the field with a gun on his arm.

Further down the line, clays started to appear some 40 yards up. They bore a great resemblance to high partridges with a good wind behind them and proved every bit as testing, with the early birds gliding down into the valley very much unbroken.

Roger’s first efforts were at clays flying over the middle of the line. One of the joys of a simulated day is that there is no bag limit and no overage, so poaching is firmly on the menu.



Patrick (right) readies himself for the grouse drive, Bryngwyn’s latest feature, as Ed Davies looks on

Now, however, clays started to float over the treetops directly above our peg on the end of the line. A miss was followed by two right-and-lefts then a long crosser out to the right. Roger turned and, with a jolly grin, announced: “I’ll be doing all right if I can keep this up.”

A second or so later, much to his son Ed’s delight, Roger fluffed a bird right over his head and followed it up with two similar misses.

He returned to form for the rest of the drive and by the time the horn

went, I was aware I had a hard act to follow. Ed loaded for me throughout, while Roger stood on my other side, mostly musing that I was giving the birds “too much lead” and suggesting they weren’t as fast as they looked. A bit less swing proved him right and I spent the last third of the drive making up for more misses than I care to remember in its early stages.

On the following drive, Rob’s Folly, we could have been in Benidorm. The sun beat down on the white stone ride that Auriol, Lady Linlithgow, had cut

up the side of the valley and the sky above us was a cloudless azure.

The shoot at Bryngwyn Hall was established three years ago after it was decided that there wasn’t enough ground to run “a proper commercial shoot”. Later that morning, over a haggis scotch egg and a gin and tonic, Lady Linlithgow explained that she runs the shoot because it gives her the opportunity to share her beautiful home with people. Bringing the 18th-century country house back from the brink of dereliction since she inherited it in 1987, she says proudly, has been her “life’s work”.

The grouse drive

After elevenes we wandered up to Bryngwyn’s latest feature, the grouse drive. With the confidence that a generous dose of Bombay Sapphire gives a man, I stepped into the butt first, with Ed Davies on my right again ready to load. The clays began to appear over the horizon in ones and twos. Further up the line, Robert Everitt of Hull Cartridge, a vivacious Yorkshireman and notoriously hot grouse shot, was making things →

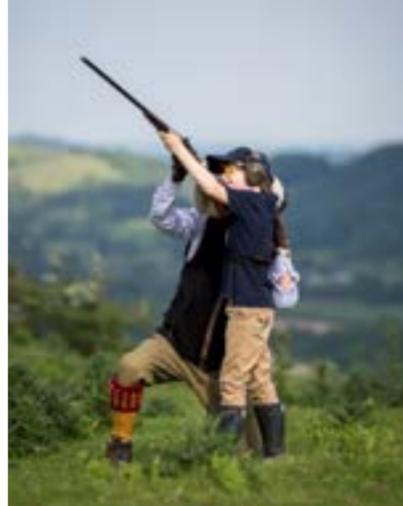
Ivan Reid at the front of the line of Guns



Clay shooting



The traps shoot a variety of realistic clays over the 17 drives on the estate



William Foreman takes a shot: Bryngwyn can cater for a range of ages and abilities



difficult by taking all the birds coming in our direction as soon as they appeared. As the number of birds grew, they started to slip past Robert's barrage of lead in ones and twos.

Whether it was the scotch eggs, the gin or the fruitcake is hard to say but either way I was breaking the clays with ruthless efficiency, including some hugely satisfying crossers to my left just before John Sutton, a northern haulage guru, had a chance to pull the trigger.

“Just for sheer childish fun, Lady Linlithgow loads some traps with exploding targets”

Three boxes of cartridges later, my form was starting to go and birds were making it past me on all sides unbroken. After a right-and-left that felt more like luck than anything else and a few straight misses, the keeper's horn was very welcome. Turning to Ed, I said: “That is the most fun I've ever had shooting clays.”

As I was loading for him, I reflected that actually it was a lot more fun than I've had on quite a number

DELUXE DELIGHT

Every drive at Bryngwyn is followed by a five-minute breather and a quick drink. Mid gin and tonic, I got chatting with Jim Stewart of Longthorne Gunmakers, who asked me if I wanted to shoot the final drive with a dainty 16-bore he had in the back of his car. Having been ridiculed for much of the day about the shoddy state of my bog-standard Silver Pigeon, I accepted his offer gladly.

The gun, a Hesketh Deluxe, was a high-grade sidelock of considerable repute. At £17,500 it is not going to be finding its way into my cabinet any time soon but for an English-made sidelock it nonetheless represents extraordinary value for money. Actually, I shot the final few birds of the day rather well with it, towering targets that curled round in the wind and floated off down into the valley.

of occasions shooting game. Just for sheer childish fun, Lady Linlithgow loads some of her traps with exploding red targets. Ed took great delight in breaking them and berated himself if one made it past.

The team of Guns to our right was a man down and deciding that, as middle-aged blokes, shooting the drive for a second time might be something of a health risk, I was summoned. Regrettably, it was too much for me: I leaned on the side of the grouse butt rather feebly and struggled to swing my gun with much elegance at all in the midday sun. Robert stood behind me filming and provided a commentary on my exhausted incompetence.

Lunch, like all the food at Bryngwyn, was superb, with

local cheeses being the party piece. The conversation focused on haulage in eastern Europe, achieving the right temperature in trucks when transporting medical supplies, again in eastern Europe, and the size of sheep farming operations in the hills above Welshpool. My contributions on all three topics were limited.

Giant's Grave

After lunch, we drove through the little village of Meifod, the royal burial ground of many of the kings and princes of Powys, and wound our way up into the hills overlooking Bryngwyn Hall for Giant's Grave, the last drive of the day.

A local farmer's son told me the area takes its name from a Neolithic burial chamber. He also said there

is “some story” about the townspeople burning the hillside to kill a witch hiding out there after her craft was discovered. “Probably not a true story though,” he added thoughtfully.

Shooting “agriculturally”

At Giant's Grave, Roger, Ed and I were on the end of the line again but this time we had birds splitting over us to the right and the left, providing some very challenging shooting. Ed and I shot rather agriculturally while Roger seemed to have found inspiration in the cheese and was delightedly turning clays into clouds of dust. Meanwhile, Robert Everitt stood around looking foolish after managing to break his gun.

As I left Bryngwyn that afternoon and drove towards a rather sweet part of Brittany for a little break, I returned to my earlier thoughts about shooting clays not giving the sportsman his feathered fix. There are still few things that thrill me more than right-and-left teal falling to my gun, but Bryngwyn's simulated day came closer to that than I thought clays ever could. Would I take another day there over hedge-skimming pheasants or reared duck? I would have to think about it very hard and that is something I never thought I'd write. 🐦

Taking a break: William Foreman, Ivan Reid and Peter Lewis

Simulated days at Bryngwyn

A typical day is approximately 250 clays per person and consists of: a full English breakfast in Bryngwyn dining room; safety briefing; drinks and refreshments; three-course lunch in the dining room; and tea and cakes at the end of the day. Instruction can be provided for non-shotgun licence holders.

A day costs £210 plus VAT per person, minimum of 10 Guns per day and £50 plus VAT per non-shooting guests. Prices include full hospitality.

Lady Linlithgow (inset) has turned her home, Bryngwyn Hall, to run simulated game days

