

My Lucky Day

John Howard recalls what is a special day for him.

It was the morning of the 6th January and traditionally my lucky day. It was a church holiday in Ireland and therefore, by our club rules, a shooting day. The weather had been extremely cold and frosty for the past few days. It was -7 degrees this morning but very dry and crisp, beautiful from a hunter's point of view.

My younger son Colm, aged 11 years, and I had decided to head for the Green Glen this morning. This is a place that we shoot once a year (like I do with most places in the parish). Normally, this area would be one of our best spots with a good chance of a few woodcock, snipe and a cock pheasant or two also. It is an area of mixed forestry and agriculture with some stubble fields near the forestry and a few of the last remaining bogs in our area. We always have a good day in this area and we were hoping that today would be no different.

Two springer spaniels loaded up and a light lunch packed, we headed off at 9.30 am. *Brandy*, the senior dog, accompanied by his son *Taz* still learning at one and a half years and mastered only by Colm, clambered into their trailer. *Taz* is Colm's dog and only accompanies me when Colm comes. The excitement was building up now as the Green Glen was an area looked forward to since last time which was twelve months ago. We have about 10,000 acres in our club and we shoot a different townland every time but the Green Glen has always been special for us.



The author pictured with the day's bag.

Fifteen minutes later we reached our location and, by now, the sun was just beginning to shine a little. As we got out from the van we immediately felt the cold air but there was something magical about it. We were here again in one of our favourite places in the world. Even when I holiday in the sun with my family, my thoughts are always about the coming season and these frosty mornings in the Green Glen.

I looked down the valley that we were about to shoot and there about 100 yards ahead was a lovely red fox meandering across the fields. He looked up at us as if to say 'good morning' and continued on his way. It must be hard on him to get a meal during this weather too.

The air was light and the countryside crisp and dry as we headed off into the valley. We were not long hunting when

Brandy went into the young spruce plantation and flushed a woodcock but no chance of a shot. Within a few minutes he flushed another and again no shot. We continued on to hunt this plantation and then veered left to do some stubbles. Here there were a few small woods at the edges and we put up two hen pheasants in one. In Ireland we don't shoot hens because we need them for our breeding stock. Our shooting is nearly all wild birds with only a small fraction of released pheasants and mallard. Having hunted the stubbles, we returned to the rest of the forestry plantation and soon the spaniels flushed another woodcock. This time he presented himself long enough to take a snap shot and, sure enough, he fell into the spruce wood. Within a few minutes I had retrieved him myself as he fell on a tree top. Having retrieved the quarry, I felt entitled to a small sip from my hip flask of my own homemade sloe gin.

A fine cock pheasant was flushed from the same plantation shortly after, but he was too far away for a shot. This is the luck of rough shooting. As we approached a farmyard I knew that there would be some kale in the area. I soon found it and the springers delighted in hunting it but only put out one hen. It was time for a light snack now and, as luck would have it, we came upon some old stones that were once used for grinding corn. These stones were very large and had a hollow chiselled out of the middle to enable the person grinding, to crush the corn. Probably worth a few bob now as these old remnants of bygone days are. As we sat on them, I thought about the last man that would have worked on them many hundreds of years ago, crushing corn for his family and livestock. If they could talk I guess they could tell some stories. Some day I must ask the farmer if I could have them before a bulldozer pushes them into a hole and they too will disappear forever.

Continuing on we met a few snipe but no shot was fired as they got up too far out. As we hunted a boggy field, *Brady* got very excited and, within seconds from a patch of rushes about 30 yards ahead, a cock pheasant rose at great speed. Gun up and shot fired without even lining him up. Missed once and missed again. I had fired too fast each time. This is a fault of mine I have had since I was starting shooting. It came about because I used to shoot with my cousin who was very fast and, if I did not shoot fast, I had no chance. To this day,

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20 years later, I find it hard to get out of the habit.

At the end of this bog the dogs found two more birds, one a hen and the other we couldn't see as it flew in through the woods. We crossed a stream that separated the two sides as we turned around for our homeward journey. Within a few minutes the dogs had flushed another woodcock up through the conifers and, with only a glimpse of him through the trees, I fired and dropped him 40 yards in the middle of a thick plantation. *Brandy* soon had him retrieved and, sure enough, *Colm* suggested another sip of that gin that we made from those sloes that we had picked from the hedges the previous autumn.

With two woodcock in the bag I was very happy but secretly hoping to take a pheasant as well to finish the day. It was not looking too good at this point in time. We were now hunting the opposite edges of the first plantation and here we had some very difficult terrain and bogs to walk. We put up two more hens and another woodcock before rounding the final corner. As we walked the edges of a favourite spot for a bird, I sent the dogs into the wood and, within minutes, a huge longtail roared out well in front of me. As usual with pheasants I put up the gun and fired too fast but, for the second shot, I steadied myself and gave him a little bit of lead and dropped him dead in mid-air. He fell across a drain well ahead of us and both dogs raced out of the woods frantically to retrieve him. I was hoping that the *Colm's* pup *Taz* would get him as he needed a few retrieves to keep him interested. Within minutes he came back with the bird in his mouth. It was a delight to see him carrying his bird so proudly as he delivered him to his master instead of me. Another sip of that



Colm with Taz.

nectar from heaven was in order as we paused to praise the dogs. We checked the wings for any tag to see if he was one of our released birds but indeed no, he was a truly wild cock.

As we walked wearily to the van while hunting the last of the forestry, we heard another cock crowing ahead of us in the woods. We agreed not to pursue him as to be this would be only greed and possibly spoil a great day. It was lovely to hear him crowing and to know that there was at least one left for breeding next season.

By now the sun was beginning to set and the temperature was below freezing again. We had two woodcock and one pheasant in the bag and the best was yet to come. Dogs fed and looked after, guns cleaned, my wife and other son *Cian* had a brace of pheasants in the oven for dinner that evening with potato stuffing, a bottle of red wine and what more could a man wish for. The day had lived up to expectations and was indeed a lucky and memorable day. It was one of those days that both of us will remember for a while and hopefully one that both my sons and I will be able to re-live many times in the future.

German Pointer Club of Ireland News

The German Pointer Club of Ireland held an open stake for HPR on 6th January 2009 at Ballincor by kind permission of Sir Robert Gough. Judges were Mr John Keane (A), Mr Robbie Doran (B) and Mr Ollie Naughton (C). The trial was kindly sponsored by Feedwell. There was a full card of 9 GSP, 2 GWP and 1 GLP. Weather conditions were poor with heavy showers of rain and sleet. Despite the best efforts of the judges who ran the dogs until it was nearly dark, there was no result.

The German Pointer Club of Ireland held an open stake for HPR on 17th January 2009 at Gallion, Newtownstewart by kind permission of Mr Joe McNamee. Judges were Mr Gerry McErlean (A), Mr Charlie Neilson (A) and Mr Gordon Sanford (C). The trial was kindly sponsored by Feedwell. There was a full card of 7 GSP, 2 GWP, 2 GLP and 1 Weimaraner. Weather conditions on the day started good but by midday, very strong wind and rain prevailed. Game on the day was scarce and there was no result. However, the dog that stood out on the day was the Weimaraner. This strong running dog had a great find on a rabbit in the first round and, with a bit of luck, could have won the trial. On the day he got his qualification of Champion. This has been a great year for Jim and Karen Gibson, breeders of Field Trial Champion GSP and Champion Weimaraner Am Ch/ Ir Ch/GB Sh Ch *Rivenwil Alabama Slammer JW, CD, JH, V*.

The German Pointer Club of Ireland held an open stake for HPR on 29th January 2009 by kind permission of Wilkinstown Gun Club. Judges were Mr Gerry Devlin (A), Mr John Keane (A) and Mr Finbar O' Sullivan (C). The trial was kindly sponsored by Feedwell. There was a full card of 7 GSP, 3 GWP and 2 GLP. Weather conditions were good with a plentiful supply of birds. This was a very good trial and, after four rounds, the judges called 2 dogs for the water test. After this was completed, the result was announced ... 1st Mr Sean O'Carolan's *Samantha of Dunwater* GSPB - Very Good and 2nd Mr Billy Lewis' *Gramhey Maggie May* GSPB - Very Good. (Editor: Report courtesy of Stephen McManus.)



Mr Sean O'Carolan, 1st in the stake on 29th January, pictured receiving the trophy from Mr Gerard Devlin (judge).



Mr Billy Lewis was 2nd in the stake on 29th January last.