

Australasia's Field Shotgunning Magazine

Feathers & Fur

ISSUE 76 Nov/Dec/Jan 2013-14

\$7.95



Inside:

National Retrieving Trial

Nest Box Workshop

Shotgun Education

Duck Call History

Vermin Control

Women in
Hunting
Special

ISSN 1323-4854



9 771323 485034

Upland Birds in

by robert sturzaker

The entrance to Joshua Creek Ranch is marked by a large Joshua Creek crest with a pheasant on it. Then comes a 500m drive along the cypress bordered Joshua Creek to Cypress Lodge and the Pro Shop. It was the perfect place for Tony Pratt and I to recover after our snow goose hunt in Missouri. Jane had arrived from New Orleans and made herself comfortable in the 'Covey Haus'; a cabin set on a hill overlooking Joshua Creek.

Our plan was for a mixed bird hunt each day leaving time for 100 targets on the fully automated sporting range.

Joshua Creek Ranch is a Beretta 'Two Trident' game ranch established 23 years ago by Joe and Ann Kercheville as a labour of love, and it shows. Joe and Ann travel the world shooting and bring back the best of what they have seen to the Ranch. And wow, what a job they have done.

They hunt turkeys, white-tailed deer, bob white quail, pheasant, and chukar partridge. As you walk around, quail and pheasant wander across your path and a pair of Egyptian geese guard the lawns. I was told the geese were Mexican Whistling Tree Ducks "very like a goose", but they are

Egyptian geese. The mystery is how they got there. The deer are not fenced in and there are plenty of them. On one of our drives back to the cabin after dark the headlights illuminated about 40 white tail deer on the open fields.

Accommodation is luxurious with enough trophies adorning the walls to keep even the most jaded shooter on his toes. Meals are served in the Cypress Lodge or around the open fire on the terrace. Tables feature quail centrepieces and the Lodge is full of pheasants, elk, nilgai, deer, bobcats chasing chukar and on it goes; fabulous!

Texas



Our accommodation, 'Covey Haus', is a substantial two bedroom cabin filled with all the luxuries you could want. We were greeted by a covey of quail that had surrounded the cabin and inside, a fridge full of tasty treats, plush appointments and beds you sink into after a hard day in the field. To top it off the front of the cabin is a broad veranda with BBQ, couches and a view over the ranch entrance and into the Texas distance.

The Texans claim there is a lot of distance in Texas and they are not kidding, it is only slightly smaller than New South Wales; Australia's third smallest state!

After breakfast at Cypress Lodge it is time to attend the Pro Shop to get our guns and cartridges for the day. The guns are Berettas of course, typically 686 Silver Pigeon U/O, available in 12, 20, 28 & 410 gauges. Tony selected a 12 gauge and I selected a 20 gauge and, since our bird hunt was in the afternoon, we headed off to the sporting clays ground.

The ground winds its way around the hills of the ranch and offers a range of targets to tune you up for the hunt. It is fully automated with a credit card like pass, which is loaded with a number of targets at the Pro Shop. Each station offers two

traps from which you can select single, following pairs or simultaneous pairs on instant or delayed release. Tony and I had great fun while Jane enjoyed the walk.

It was on station one when we realised the guns at Joshua Creek have automatic safety catches. What a pain in the butt! No doubt you get used to them but for those of us who don't have them it is a horrid realisation when you pull the trigger and get nothing. Then the panicked realisation that the target is getting away draws quick action which sometimes works and sometimes doesn't.



This is one very unlucky pheasant that has just been flushed from cover by the dogs.

Needless to say the shooter not in the stand and Jane thought this was funny.

Interesting that this was not an issue when hunting the birds! I typically hunt ducks and quail with the safety on and while I could not tell you how it gets released, it does. At Field and Game simulated field target shoots I never put the safety on at all and never have any problems. Weird!

We heard a few shots in the distance and realised that others were out hunting and we were keen to get to work.

Back to Cypress Lodge for a hearty lunch. The meals are large and feature dessert, which I would advise you not to taste because once you have one, it is all over baby! Then we met our guide, Brad Buell, a big broad shouldered Texan with an easy going manner.

Well why wouldn't he? He has the perfect job. The only worry in his life is how to manage the jealousy between his partner and super dog Callie (more on that later).

We put guns and cartridges in the dog trailer which holds eight dogs and has compartments for gear on the top. With Jane trying to destroy discipline among the dogs; "Oobe Goobie", "Aren't you just gorgeous"; you know the sort of stuff, we set



Stairway to the clay course.



Tony takes a high overhead clay target while Robert looks on.



Brad gets Maggie out of the trailer and ready for work.

out for the area of the property called the “Domeir” run. We subsequently shot over “South Texas”, “100 acre field”, “Stone Pasture” and “Kennel Pheasant” runs.

After adorning ourselves and the dogs with bright orange vests, we set out with a Brittany spaniel and English setter for pointing duties, and Callie the super dog; not a pointer in sight, it was wonderful.

Now, a word about Callie. She is a delightful black cocker spaniel with white socks on her front feet and the most happy and engaging personality you can imagine. Before each hunt she would bound out of her cage and insist on getting a cuddle from each of us before we started. She saved the biggest display for Brad who, somewhat sheepishly, admitted she was his

favourite and personal pet. He also said she likes to sit on his lap, which causes friction with his partner, who thinks that is her territory.

The guy has a charmed life, with women and dogs fighting for his affection.

Callie is a treat alright but all business once we started. The pointing dogs located the birds and Callie was brought to heel with “hup” until Tony and I were in position. Then it was “Callie, birds up”. At this point little Callie would trot past the nose of the big dogs on point and flush the birds. She has a distinct air of superiority over the pointing dogs. She knows that she and Brad are in charge and the pointers are really only there to give them some exercise.



Robert and Tony with some of their pheasants and partridge.