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COUNTRY LIFESTYLE INSPIRATION ~ SEASONAL RECIPES ~ PLUS SO MUCH MORE

The Mighty Macnab Challenge.

Written by Vicky Ryan.



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Often dubbed one of fieldsport's greatest achievements, the Macnab Challenge originates from the novel *John Macnab*, by the author John Buchan, who also wrote the acclaimed crime novel *The 39 Steps*.

The character, John Macnab, was inspired by the real-life Captain James Brander Dunbar, who wrote to *The Field Magazine* in 1951 to brag that he 'could kill a beast in any forest in Scotland'.

The novel recounts the tale of three men who are bored. Seeking excitement they decide to turn to poaching.

The friends head up to a Scottish estate during the summer and warn their neighbouring estates of their intentions to poach a salmon or stag from them and return without their ever knowing.

"Sir, I have the honour to inform you that I propose to kill a stag, or a salmon as the case may be, on your ground between midnight [...] and midnight." And so the Macnab was established as a real challenge; to bag a salmon, a brace of grouse and a stag between dawn and dusk, however completing it without being detected is no

longer required! Quite the opposite in fact; in theory a Macnab can be completed on any estate where there are; stag, salmon and grouse, but the real success of the challenge lies in having enough personnel to get you quickly from each location to the next, as soon as you have been successful.

Whilst John Macnab was written about three men, today sees a lot more women attempting the challenge. According to recent statistics from the British Association of Shooting and Conservation, the number of women shooting



has risen by a third over the last four years. It would seem that the shooting industry for women has come a long way since Queen Victoria famously said, "Only fast women shoot!"

Victoria Knowles-Lacks founded the well-known Shotgun & Chelsea Bun Club and the Ladies' Shooting Club, in order to get more women to try shooting. She says, "The women's shooting market is phenomenal and has definitely exploded in the last seven years or so. There are so many companies, shooting grounds, clubs etc doing so much for women and really welcoming more into the sport.

When I first started the Shotgun & Chelsea Bun Club in 2011 there wasn't a great deal out there for women. There were incredible female shooters and the likes of Holland & Holland with their ladies' courses, but not a great deal else. We have some real role models leading the way in terms of inspiration and the fact that we have things

like the Browning Liberty Light (a gun designed for women) is incredible. It just wouldn't have happened when I first started out; women were just expected to shoot a 20 gauge."

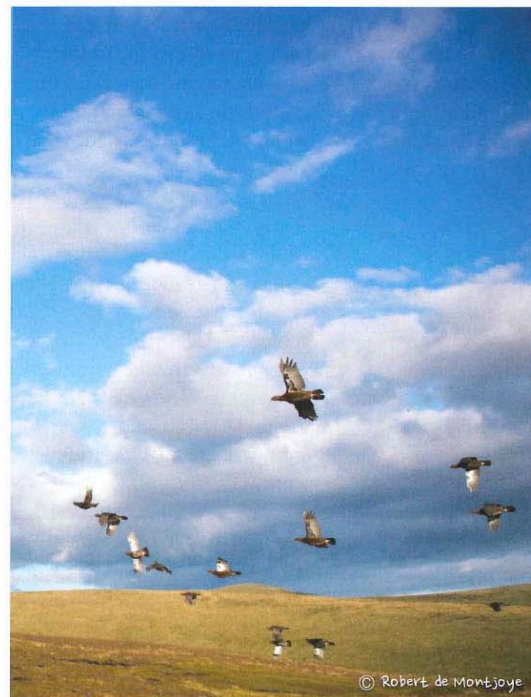
Victoria goes on to say, "Where we've really found success in the Shotgun & Chelsea Bun Club is through our members and our unique community. Our members have really set us apart and

have helped to shape the industry. We are so lucky to have such an inclusive and fun-loving group of women who genuinely support each other and through our events, connections are made, friendships are forged, and new adventures happen.

There's a real sense of togetherness, fun, and camaraderie that women have that they take forward in their shooting to other clubs, grounds and shoots. It's infectious enthusiasm and leading by example."



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~ THE MIGHTY MACNAB ~

This is something Emily Coates (a member of the Ladies' Macnab Club who will be attempting her first Macnab this season) agrees with: "The social side of shooting is wonderful; if you have a good group of girls together you have a fantastic day. It is also important to build a relationship with the ghillie as well as the keeper, as you can learn so much and gain lots of information. I am still in touch with the ghillie from the Tulchan-Glenisla Estate, ahead of the Macnab, getting updates on the water levels and gaining an understanding of the season as a whole."

So, in a changing world that is facing the effects of global warming and a war on plastic, and with many people turning to vegetarianism out of consideration for the environment, is there still a demand for the Macnab? Lucie Boedts-Kuehnle, founder of the Ladies' Macnab Club, certainly thinks so.

"As a club, our main objectives are to promote sustainable and ecological lifestyles for ladies concerned about obtaining wild proteins whilst keeping a balance with the natural ecosystem. While Macnabbing in Scotland has been an activity particularly appealing for women enjoying the wild connection with nature, the Ladies' Macnab Club has decided to expand its territory to destinations such as Africa and Argentina to replicate the same challenge with local species. This expansion is also driven by the Ladies' Macnab Club's intention to reduce its presence in Scotland as salmon and grouse species in the UK are to be protected for environmental reasons. We are now focusing on development of our Macnab activities in other regions of the world, where the wild species are less at risk. For Scotland, we are now drawing our attention to development of recreational deer stalking courses in the UK to develop environmental awareness of the excess of deer and this is taking both our resources and focus at the moment. This will be a good way for us to recruit new members. The Ladies' Macnab challenge in Scotland would then be



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reserved to one exceptional lady per year.” closes Lucie Boedts-Kuehnle.

In preparation for her Macnab, Emily completed a deer stalking course with Lucie at Tulchan Lodge in Scotland. During the course she learnt everything from how to take a safe shot to the preparation of the meat, as well as reading the landscape. Emily hopes the course has set her in good stead for her attempt at the Macnab and emphasised the importance of being able to practise every day during the course.

So what advice does Emily have for other hopefuls looking to bag a Macnab this season? “It can be such a long day, where you walk many miles and so you need to really prep your body for that.” Emily has placed a strong emphasis on her training, as she says many people don’t always consider the physical demands of the Macnab. One way in which Emily has been getting fit for the

challenge is to have recently completed ‘another sporting trio’ - the Blenheim triathlon. “When it comes to the Macnab, comfort is absolutely key. You will be out there in the elements all day and the weather can be very changeable. A beloved pair of walking boots that are really well worn-in, is a must. You need to dress for warmth and have waterproof layers to hand. Big pockets are extremely useful, and some snacks to see you through the day – a soggy sandwich in your pocket could just be the burst of energy you need!”

Lady Melissa Percy, founder of Mistamina was first introduced to field sports at a very young age and agrees with Emily when it comes to kit. “From an outdoor country girl’s perspective, I have to agree with the saying: *‘there’s no such thing as bad weather, just bad kit.’* I always take out a few jackets with me as waterproof doesn’t always stand the test when up against the elements.”

Emily has also learnt, in her preparation for the Macnab, not to be afraid to ask for advice. “I think as women, we are sometimes concerned that we will be looked down on if we do ask. However, I have found nice, keen and willing people in the industry who have given me advice on everything from which flies will work best, to tips for what kit to take.”

Victoria Knowles-Lacks believes the future of ladies in fieldsports looks incredibly positive; “Look what we’ve achieved already! Especially as women are no longer a novelty in the line. We’ve dropped the use of ‘lady gun’ and ‘lady shot’, we’re all just ‘shots’ or ‘guns’. I don’t think we’ve reached anywhere near our peak yet as an industry, but we have come such a long way in such a relatively short time and I think there is so much more we can all do.”