

# Scottish Field®

COUNTRY NEWS INTERIORS GARDENS FOOD & DRINK PROPERTY ANTIQUES FASHION TRAVEL NOVEMBER 2017, £4.25

## SARAH MACK

The television presenter's love affair with Aberdeenshire

WIN  
LUXURY STAY  
IN A TOP ST  
ANDREWS  
SPA HOTEL

DENIS LAWSON  
ON HIS LIFE  
LESS ORDINARY

Plus

DUMFRIESSHIRE  
TOWER HOUSE  
SKIBO CASTLE  
DREAM RECIPES  
A DEESIDE MACNAB  
CLANS AT  
THE TATTOO

**10** We reveal the best  
4x4s of the year  
PAGES OF

**LEST WE FORGET** – Special inside report on the ex-servicemen manning Lady Haig's Poppy Factory

NOVEMBER 2017





'This gloriously picturesque 15,000-acre estate borders the iconic deerstalking ground of Balmoral'



## Hunting a hat-trick

A stag, grouse and a salmon are the target in the Ladies MacNab Challenge

WORDS CLAIRE ZAMBONI IMAGES ROBERT DE MONTJOYE

**W**e all have a bucket list. Mine is extensive, although the MacNab has featured close to the top for quite some time. I've been fascinated by the concept ever since I read John Buchan's iconic 1925 novel *John MacNab*, in which three sporting mavericks – Sir Edward Leithen, John Palliser-Yeates and The Earl of Lamancha – embark on a Highland poaching odyssey.

The MacNab still pits skill and endurance against the clock and wild, unpredictable quarry, all set against a Highland backdrop, although the format is fundamentally different these days. To take three species, a stag, a brace of grouse and a salmon, in one day is always going to be in the balance and relies on nature's compliance as well as skill, but the poaching element has been consigned to the fiction from whence it came.

So instead of invading a Highland estate by stealth, my chance to put my personal hunting prowess to the test by attempting to complete a MacNab came courtesy of an extravagant invitation from Lucie Kuehnle, who founded and runs The Ladies MacNab Challenge. Every year, Lucie invites several ladies from around the world to attempt this challenge at her family's estate, Tulchan Lodge in Glenisla.

This gloriously picturesque 15,000-acre estate borders Balmoral and is one of the finest places to stalk deer in the Highlands. It was also a wonderful contrast for me after three wonderful days with my son at the

Above: A grouse flies by in the Ladies MacNab Challenge. Top right: Striding across the stunning scenery at Tulchan Lodge in Glenisla. Bottom right: The party makes its way into the glen.





## 'The Ladies MacNab Challenge stands at the crossroads of ecology, gastronomy, ethics and pleasure'

Edinburgh Fringe. As he reluctantly headed back to work, I left the town behind and headed north-west to the country with a spring in my step.

Lucie, a successful international lawyer, and her husband Florian, are European gypsies in the most exuberant sense, dividing their time between Luxembourg, Germany, Belgium and Scotland. Lucie is one of those dizzyingly talented polymaths who has a keen interest in everything from ecology to art, and is even a skilled taxidermist. She also has a refreshingly holistic view of field sports that chimes with my own approach, so as soon as a mutual friend introduced us we clicked.

It was an honour to arrive at Tulchan and be welcomed into the heart of her family with her husband there to welcome me while her three young children cavorted around. Her eldest daughter is already embracing fieldsports and Lucie was keen to have women around that could inspire both her daughters to adopt a healthy attitude to shooting wild game that revolves around the importance of respecting the quarry. She was also keen to install the qualities they would need to one day run the estate in the sustainable manner in which it is currently run, with all the game shot on the estate expertly cooked by the resident chef.

The Ladies MacNab Challenge 'is a concept aiming at responsible, comprehensive approach to food and stands at the crossroads of ecology,

gastronomy, ethics and pleasure'. To this end, Lucie supports art foundations and has had artists in residence at the estate. There is a seriousness to proceedings: the quarry are testing and there's no prospect of the day unfolding like an al fresco cocktail party.

I was greeted by Lucie's dashing German husband, dressed impeccably in sporting tweeds. Florian's father discovered and bought the estate after searching for many years, and there was a nice European feel to the party staying at their Victorian hunting lodge, Tulchan Lodge. My companion for the next couple of days was Robert de Montjoye, a keen Belgian hunter and photographer who accompanied the first few participants of The Ladies MacNab Challenge with his camera. Marina Gibson, the well-known fly fisherwoman, arrived the next day and prepared for the challenge while I was introduced to ghillie Dougie Morrison, who gave me a much-needed spey casting refresher.

After a family meal of roe venison from the estate followed by an early night, Marina and I headed to the River Ericht at 6am only to find that after a day of torrential rain the river was in flood. There was to be no fishing. We raced back to the moor, where Florian selected a stunning 20-bore side-by-side David Mackay shotgun for me to use. We quickly set off, walking in a line of four across the moor, and despite some unkind weather Marina shot her first ever grouse, which was a magical spectacle. Sadly, with no second grouse forthcoming, her challenge was over. Happily, with a brace in my own bag, I continued to the next step, heading to the hill with Nick Stewart, the estate's second stalker, after a quick lunch.

Nick started as a gamekeeper after leaving school at 15 and has worked at Tulchan for three years. 'The main reason I like working here is that it is an estate that still believes in managing deer in a traditional manner and believes that deer are still a valuable asset to a sporting estate,' he tells me.

Despite the time pressure – something stalkers rarely have to deal with – Nick loves these days. 'The biggest pleasure I get from the Ladies

**Clockwise from top left:** Fishing in the River Ericht; Walking through the Tulchan Lodge estate; Casting off into the river; Salmon fishing in the Ericht; A net is on standby for the catches.



**'We lay there in silence until I was confident of the shot and the stag fell immediately'**

**Above:** A grouse takes flight. **Above right:** The MacNab party enjoy the sights on the grouse moor.

MacNab Challenge is taking someone out who has limited experience and presenting them with the opportunity to take on or accomplish this great challenge,' he grins.

We drove to the top of Glenisla where the views over vast swathes of Highland Scotland, including Balmoral, take your breath away. Even in August the weather is unpredictable and within a couple of hours we experienced hot sunshine, driving rain and bright skies. Nothing puts Nick off, though, and he soon spots deer moving in the distance while we take shelter in the Land Rover. Factoring in the wind, he knows where they will shelter from the conditions, so we start walking in a large curve to prevent our scent being carried in the deer's direction by the elements.

But although we approach stealthily, the beasts had simply disappeared. By now I was acutely aware of the clock ticking, especially as we had arranged to meet Dougie at 6.30pm and it would take a good 50 minutes to get there over the rutted tracks. We walked swiftly across the glen, faces set into the driving rain as the terrain became ever steeper. Finally, we crawled down on our bellies until we saw small groups of deer.

We tried to set the first shot up, but it was too challenging for me as I was lying in such a steep, crooked position and was not confident that my .243 rifle was securely mounted. So we crawled ever closer, and I watched the stag through the scope. We lay there in silence until I was confident of the shot and the stag fell immediately, a 226-metre kill.

Way below us, the Argocat struggled to find a suitable ford to cross the river so Nick and I dragged the carcass down to the bottom of the hill before driving back to the lodge. Time was running out, so we sped to the river, finding it considerably calmer than in the morning. Dusk was fast setting in, so we ran to the bank and started fishing at 7.30pm. Three hours later, the owner of the beat came and retrieved us. I was reluctant to leave but confident I had given this momentous challenge my best shot.

I arrived back at the lodge, exhausted yet exhilarated by one of the most memorable sporting days of my life. There was naturally a part of me that felt disappointed that I had not completed the challenge and the salmon had eluded me, although my overwhelming emotion was one of appreciation and gratitude at having the opportunity to tick off one of my bucket list moments. Besides, there is always next year... 🍷

**FIELD  
FACTS**



Tulchan  
Lodge,  
Angus  
Perthshire  
PH 11 8 QW.  
Tel: 01575 582264  
[www.tulchan-glenisla.co.uk/](http://www.tulchan-glenisla.co.uk/)