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# My fieldsports Valhalla

Peter Glenser explains how his last day's shooting would be the chance to be reunited with those who have shaped his sporting path

**N**o one wants to contemplate their last day of doing something they love, but since this is a fantasy day I shall treat it as a celebration of all that has gone before and not with any sense of brooding finality. It is the company, of course, that makes it all worthwhile, though each element of a day's sport plays its part.

So I shall choose my canine and human companions with great care, and though all of the latter will be proficient Shots, their principal distinguishing feature will be an ability not to take themselves too seriously. They will also have that essential quality in a sportsman or woman – humour in adversity.

I want to squeeze every ounce out of this day, so in order to get the light it will have to be in northern Britain and obviously after 12 August. Though a certain discomfort during the day throws the pleasures of a bath and a dram into sharp relief later, I think on this day we can do without the midges and ticks, thank you.

We will assemble in London and travel by sleeper. Not being a Scotrail service, we won't have to worry about an unnecessary ban on firearms and it will be easy to identify fellow sportsmen by their tweeds and baggage. This makes for agreeable chat in the bar, as I await the rest of my party – apart from Mike Robinson, who would have got there first and be surrounded by a group of men and women hanging on his every word.

Next to arrive would be the ever-efficient Tim Cray. Tim, together with Al Young, has been a constant sporting companion over the years. Tim would arrive heavily laden as, for some complicated and inconvenient reason, he has had to transport Al's kit for him. This will turn out to be important, as Al will not be able to make the departure time, but will need to have

the train stop somewhere – probably unscheduled – so he can join the party.

Jonathan Young will be an essential contributor to the day, adding a deep understanding of country and quarry, and savagely funny teasing of his fellow guests. My nephew Charlie Gair would be present – after 10 years serving with the Irish Guards in some hot and hellish places he could do with some more Hebridean weather. Also on the London leg would be

**“There would be no long minutes disentangling fly from bush”**

my daughter Georgia – luckily for me she enjoys tramping over the moors, gun in hand, and shot her first grouse when she was 12.

Waiting at Inverness would be the Scottish contingent: Lucie Boedts-Kuehnle and Simon Barr. Lucie brings passion, enthusiasm and energy to all that she does and is an extremely fine Shot, as is Simon, who excels on both river and hill. From Inverness it would be a short flight to Stornoway and then on to Harris until



Peter Glenser with his original Macnab from 2013

we arrive at the heart-stoppingly beautiful Amhuinnsuidhe Castle.

## Proper fish

The day would start with a little fishing under Simon's gentle encouragement. There would be no long minutes disentangling fly from bush, leader from rock, no moments looking down to see constrictor-like coils of line edging ominously closer to my foot. For once, it would be casting, stripping and moving until a proper fish takes my fly and, after an exciting and dramatic struggle, it is gently manoeuvred into the net.

We will return to Amhuinnsuidhe for breakfast and then set off for the hills. Harris grouse are not inclined to live hugger-mugger with one another until later in the season compared with their mainland counterparts. They are wary. They are wild. They

The venue – the stunning Amhuinnsuidhe Castle on the Isle of Harris



The day would start with a little fishing, concluding with a proper fish in the net

are a worthy sporting quarry. There are not enough grouse for a driven day, so walked-up it must be, over spaniels.

My old black-and-white springer Molly, who has been occupying the happy hunting grounds for many years now, will be brought back for the day. I hope I will be able to hold back the tears of joy at seeing her again so that I can shoot straight. She will quarter as beautifully as ever, missing nothing, and only give me a slightly reproachful look if I do not perform as well as she expects.

At my side will be my current dog, the mighty Finn, a big and powerful liver flatcoat, getting on a bit now, but for this day he will be in top condition. If an emotion could be made flesh, he is what pure joy would look like, such is his lust for life. He will not feel the need to work quite so independently from me, will deliver to hand, will pay less attention to any bitches present and ignore other male dogs. We will be as happy as dog and man can be.

We will not shoot many birds, but each will be one to remember. Some,

no many, will outsmart the Guns. I need a brace to my own gun and I won't complain if I have a few more, but I want to admire the view, watch the dogs and my fellow Guns, and acid-etch the picture of Georgia's right-and-left on my memory.

After lunch on the heather it will be time to start heading for home – until Innes, the estate manager, suggests that with the salmon and the grouse in my bag, I should attempt to repeat my Macnab. Gun is exchanged for rifle and we set off. Innes has gassed the hill and seen a stag that needs taking. I need nothing fancy – a poor beast will do me fine.

## Perfect spot

We make good time and Innes delivers me to the perfect spot. The stag is there and in no time he is down to a single shot. I experience that curious mixture of feelings known to all sportsmen – a twinge of regret at a life taken combined with pride at a job well and humanely done, and the knowledge that he will not die a slow death on the hill in the coming winter.

Innes makes the preparations for him to be taken off and we head back, ready for a dram over gun cleaning and dog settling before a long evening of convivial companionship, fine food and a glass or two.

Perhaps this is a foretaste of some fieldsports Valhalla, where we shall be reunited with those we have loved, our faithful hounds and our companions over the happy years spent in the woods, fields and by the ever-running stream. Until, at last, it's time to come home – home from the hill.

→ Peter Glenser is the chairman of BASC.



Heading for the hills to walk-up wild and wary Harris grouse