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French saints on a Scottish moor

Three Braque St. Germaines join an assortment of other breeds for a day's walked-up sport in the Borders.

An email from a German lady called Annette Kastner started it all. "Would you be interested in coming and photographing our Braque St. Germaines working in the Lammermuirs?" She and some friends were Braque St. Germain enthusiasts and were coming to Scotland to work them for the first time on grouse and partridge.

My first question was, "What is a Braque St. Germain?" Luckily I had a book on HPR breeds handy and I soon discovered a Braque St. Germain is a French HPR breed that looks remarkably like an orange and white English pointer – not surprising considering they supposedly originated from a cross between an English pointer and a Braque Francais.

I was very interested in Annette's offer, which was how I eventually

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY: DAVID HUDSON

came to be sitting in the kitchen of Doug Virtue from Lammermuirs Game Services with Annette and her friends eating scones, drinking coffee and looking forward to seeing their dogs in action.

The plan was to spend the first day on the moor after grouse and the second on the lower ground where partridge, snipe and perhaps more grouse would be found. We had an eclectic mixture of dogs with us: Winni, Weika and Wito were the BSGs, then there was a cocker and two springers, an Italian spinone plus a beagle and a doberman pinscher with non-combatant status.

The first things we saw on reaching the moor were two tall stone towers. Doug explained these were the Twinlaw Cairns.

Legend has it that Edgar, a Scottish chieftain, had twin sons, one of whom was stolen during a raid by the Saxons and raised by them. Many years later the Saxons raided again and were confronted by Edgar and his warriors on the hilltop. They decided, instead of a pitched battle, to pit the best warrior from either side against each other in single combat. The fight ended with one man dead and the other dying, at which point it was discovered the two were actually the twin brothers. A sad tale indeed.

Nevertheless, the sun was shining, the breeze was blowing freshly and the grouse were waiting. We set off across the hill with the guns – Winni Kaufer, Sebastian Schreiber and Stefan Hoppe – walking in line while one of the BSGs hunted in front under the control of Annette Kastner and Karola Richards. Headkeeper Jez Thornton kept us under a modicum of control while Ian Hendy from Castle Gunmakers supplied the guns and cartridges and had his springer and Italian spinone with him to retrieve in case the BSGs struggled with the alien conditions.

Considering that the BSGs had never seen or scented a grouse before, nor ever run on heather moorland, it was impressive to see how well they got out and hunted. Their stamina was excellent and they quartered across the wind as well as any of our native pointing breeds would have done. By mid-September though, with the wind



Winni Kaufer takes a grouse from Braque St. Germain Weika – a first for both gun and dog.



A moment's pause with storm clouds gathering in the background.

blowing freshly and the heather a bit wet, the grouse were never going to sit tightly and it was difficult for the dogs to get a steady point as the birds rose as soon as there was a dog anywhere near.

We took a short break for elevenses before we worked back across the hill to where the vehicles were waiting with lunch, adding a couple more grouse to the bag on the way. Then we took another beat across the moor and found a big pack – probably 300 plus – of grouse sheltering in the lee of the hill. They rose in a bunch and departed en masse without giving any of the guns the chance of a shot. We ended the day with two-and-a-half brace of grouse.

A slow start, but what an end...

The next morning found us on the margins of the moor where patches of heather mingled with grass, rushes and bracken. The first bird in the bag was a snipe, shot by

Sebastian and quickly retrieved by Winni to her handler Karola. Game was scarce at first, though Weika pointed a blue hare, flushed it and retrieved it with no need for any intervention from the guns. We soon got into ground where there were a few grouse and plenty of partridges plus the odd snipe. The partridge were very quick to rise and strong on the wing making for difficult shooting, but with the BSGs working hard in front of the line the guns had to stay alert.

We lunched and then dropped down the hill for a last foray. The partridge were sitting tighter in thicker cover and Stefan finally shot his first partridge.

We made our way back to Doug's house where there was an unexpected treat. Annette had expressed a desire to taste the grouse they had shot on the first day and Doug had taken off the breasts, added a few partridge breasts for contrast, marinated them overnight and then flash-fried them with slices

of black pudding. Eaten with rowan jelly and washed down with Scotch whisky and a very nice German Riesling, it made for the perfect ending to two days of fascinating dog work and a great introduction to the superb sport the Scottish Borders has to offer. 🐦



Gun and dog on full alert.