

Consume drama

Will **Charlotte Reather**'s culinary skills cut the mustard when she and her beau host a shooting "lash lunch"?

YOU can tell a lot about a fellow by the lunch he gives, especially if he never actually hosts one. Many people in the shooting fraternity will have heard, or indeed had dealings with the notorious humbug, Sir George Huntley. Every year he would send out invitations to join him for a day's shooting at the end of the season. He would enclose a list of dates he was free on beforehand and if a gun accepted but did not offer a reciprocal day, Sir George would uninvite him, stating that: "he was no longer welcome to join his day because of his rank selfishness". Those who provided the mandatory return invitation were usually disappointed by Sir George's day... because it never happened. He would cancel at the last minute after enjoying as much free shooting as he could possibly muster.

As Comb Over Man (COM) and I prepare to host our first shoot lunch together this season we're reviewing the variety of days we have enjoyed and endured over the years.

There is the "I'm new to shooting lunch", hosted by Flash-Harry from London. He has recently acquired a smart pad in the country, purchased all his clothing from Holland & Holland and bought a couple of Purdey side-by-sides. Two million quid later Flash is ready to go shooting - he's got all the gear but no idea. Lunch will be lavish - *lavish*. The guns will get an inkling as to just how lavish when they sip the vintage champoo in the morning and find the peg numbers engraved on the base of the Waterford flutes.

Then there's the "smart syndicate lunch", hosted by a very senior banker - the one who never loses his job however incompetent he is - at his grand residence. The guns are ushered into the smart dining-room and told they can unwrap their sandwiches. What the wives have prepared becomes more competitive each season - although the single man always has a Ginsters pie from the garage. Pork pies, ham sandwiches and other exotic things are placed on the table. "Ooh, you've got a Scotch egg - I'll trade you five quails eggs for one Scotch, what do you say?" As everyone tucks into their packed lunch the host is delivered

something out of the kitchen by the butler. The guns look on enviously as he breaks into his Beef Wellington.

At the "traditional syndicate lunch" the wives - or someone else's daughter who is a chalet girl/deck-hand/"chef" (well, she's got a Leith's diploma and was really good at home economics) - prepare lunch. It is usually a stew or perhaps a roast - the food tends to be good. Although, if you're really unlucky - as I was one day - you might be served congealed Moroccan lamb tagine with couscous by the host's daughter: the anti-chef.

I also know several "ladies wot shoot their lunch" who, after an outstanding day in the field, effortlessly turn out a delicious lunch. Now this is just showing off but women who shoot do tend to be capable people indeed.

My favourite type of day and undoubtedly the most fun is one that ends with a "lash lunch". After a 60-bird, shoot-on-through day

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it's down to the pub for man-pies, stew and copious amounts of wine, port, brandy or whatever's going. A mini award ceremony takes place after the main course with a bottle of port awarded to the best shot, a bottle for the worst shot and a bottle for "bad dogging" - there's nothing worse than your dog bringing back an "oven ready" bird, apart from when he tinkles up your hostess's chair - although she did bring it upon herself by calling my Labrador, Asbo, "fat" to his face.

Lash lunches tend to wind up very late with guns being manhandled into their cars by their irate wives - if they haven't flounced off home in disgust. COM had one such experience after getting howling drunk in Cornwall. Uncle John, a former general, was entertaining the great and good of the county that evening.



COM was driven to his uncle's house by a friend's wife, taking comfort in the fact it was her hubby who was sick out of the window on the way and not him. It took 20 minutes to wrestle him into a dinner jacket and he could

barely stand without the aid of furniture. "It was awful, not only because I was sitting next a woman called Priscilla - you try saying Prishcillah when you're four sheets to the wind - but it was also bloody roast lamb again which I'd eaten at the shoot lunch only hours before," says COM.

Owing to the fact COM and I are inveterate alco-frolics we will definitely be hosting a lash lunch - although we are now wise enough to keep the evening free of other social engagements. Our day won't be flash but we will always guarantee hot nosh, excellent lubrication and high birds - though not necessarily of the feathered variety. ■

Charlotte Reather is winner of the Gloucestershire Glamour Award 2008