



STUCKERIDGE, DEVON

This rising star of the West Country shooting scene has high ambitions.

PHOTOGRAPHY: BOB ATKINS

There is a certain part of the West Country which is as close to driven game shooting's Mecca as you can get. Yes, there are parts of North Yorkshire and Wales which offer an eye-watering amount of heavenly sport, and we would never discount Scotland's bounteous delights, but where Somerset and Devon meet there is a genuine game shooting Utopia. This is where the modern concept of high bird shooting was born and has subsequently developed, with shoots like Castle Hill, Charget, Miltons and Molland all leading the field. In fact, mere mention of these hallowed sporting valleys sends a shiver down the spine of the intrepid game shooter. Hardly surprising then that people will travel from all corners of the world to this most rural and quintessential part of England to enjoy the unique challenge and atmosphere of the global epicenter of high bird shooting.

For some years now Angus Barnes and his team at Loyton Sporting have been tapping into this rich vein of sporting nirvana by hosting teams at the purpose-built Loyton Lodge and sending them out on shoots such as Haddeo, Combe Sydenham, Challacombe and, most recently, Stuckeridge. They have used all their local knowledge and understanding of what makes a good day's shooting to create tailor-made experiences to meet every

Stuckeridge has the topography to present stunning birds.

need of the visiting guns. So everybody stood up and took notice when they added Stuckeridge to the stable three years ago.

A dedicated headkeeper

The beautiful landscape around Stuckeridge House offers a visually stunning setting for presenting sporting birds straight out of the top drawer and, since the new team has been in place, the shoot has gone from strength to strength. Headkeeper Robert Cleave (or "Spud" as he is universally known) was underkeeper at Miltons before he came to lead the Stuckeridge shoot in 2012. Since then he has quickly made his mark and has ambitious plans for building the reputation of this small but growing

“Where Somerset and Devon meet there is a genuine game shooting Utopia.”

family shoot into something very special indeed, offering truly memorable days to visiting guns.

One of the first things Spud did when he arrived was to plant 80 acres of cover crops and construct 3,000 metres of pens. This has provided productive ground from which to present a varied and well-managed blend of drives, both in terms

DEVON



LEFT: Despite the rain this team of American guns had a tremendous day's shooting. **ABOVE:** Stuckeridge offers a variety of drives both in terms of bird presentation and appearance.

of quality of bird and of setting. Stuckeridge Wood is one of Spud's favourite drives and it's not hard to see why. Steep slopes clad in oak and Douglas fir flank the Iron Mill Stream, which joins the Exe nearby. In fact, morning breaks are often held in the fishing hut by the tributary. It's an extremely pretty setting which offers tremendous flushes of soaring birds which are synonymous with Exmoor shooting.

On other drives such as Ash Cross

the guns are lined up through the bottom of the cleave with the elegant curve of a steep Devon rise above; it is from beyond this horizon that a series of high and gliding pheasants appear to test the skills of those excited guns stood well below. In his brief time on the ground Spud has also already managed to add five or six excellent new drives such as Grattens, Stoodleigh Moor, Larches and Iron Mill.

A family atmosphere

The shoot lies just two miles from Bampton in Devon, just to the south of Exmoor, and it is easily accessible by road from Junction 27 (Tiverton) on the M5. The principal landowner

is Henry Llewellyn who has leased his ground to the Stuckeridge shoot. The land comprises a mixture of dramatic wooded valleys and rolling pasture, with plenty of cover crops in place now after all the tremendous work undertaken by Spud and his team in the last few years. The main part of the estate is given over to forestry but the outlying areas are all actively farmed.

Angus Barnes and his Loyton Sporting team run the shoot for a syndicate but, in addition to the syndicate, days are made available to new and existing members. And a loyal following of British, European and North American guns continue to be attracted by the relaxed family

atmosphere of the shoot. On the day of our visit the team that was unlucky to experience a particularly wet day in this green and pleasant land had travelled from America, as they do every year, to enjoy the unique challenge and thrill of driven shooting in the UK. Loyton lodge is a famous purpose-built shoot lodge owned by the Barnes Family and provides much of the accommodation for Stuckeridge, as it is only 10 minutes away.

Meanwhile on the ground, headkeeper Spud is supported by three principal beatkeepers: Matthew Ball, Joe Weeks and James Parkman. The main quarry here is pheasant but there are also some partridge on offer and Stuckeridge is shot two or three times a week through the heart of the season.

“Guns from across the world come here for the relaxed family atmosphere.”

High ambitions

Clearly Stuckeridge is already established as an excellent shoot but it is equally clear that resting on laurels is not an option for this progressive management team. Angus and his team are fully aware that at the very top end of commercial driven shooting staying still effectively equates to going backwards, and so development plans are given priority, as Angus explained: “Spud has already taken the shoot to new levels, but he plans to continue that development by trying new strains of pheasant and improving cropping techniques and driving methods.

“Unusually, Spud is also absorbed by statistics and the analysis of results. Much of the improvement has already come from looking at all these figures. His ambition, which is mirrored by the resident syndicate, is to make



In this part of the UK good pickers-up are essential.



Alert and ready, like the rest of the team here.



Robert Cleave, universally known as 'Spud', is the headkeeper at Stuckeridge.



This shoot has retained some of the family atmosphere which makes it very special.

On the shoot

Stuckeridge one of the finest shoots in the West Country. He is firmly on his way to achieving this.

“Stuckeridge has grown immeasurably in the last three seasons under the stewardship of Spud and his team, both in terms of quality and delivery; so much so that availability is really rather scarce. With the support of the Founding Members, Spud is looking at a number of innovative ways to improve the shoot still further. To this end, he has also been restoring some of the traditional lakes and ponds on the estate, recognising the visual and ecological merits of water.

“One of the reasons I am so proud of this particular shoot is that it seems to combine high bird shooting within a family atmosphere almost effortlessly. There is a strong link to the owners of the estate and more often than not, the local squire is seen patrolling the woods to ensure that all is as it should be.” 🦉

For more information on shooting availability, visit loyton.com



You can't beat a springer for some proper dirty work.

The area guide

How to get there, where to stay and what to eat.



TRAVEL



Taunton is the main access point to this area of the West Country if you are travelling down the M5 and it's 165 miles from London. If you don't get stuck in any of the notorious traffic black spots then it's three hours on the road. But if you would rather let the train or the plane take the strain then it's within easy reach of either Exeter or Bristol, which both have decent sized airports and rail connections to the rest of the UK.

STAY



Not surprisingly for an area so rich in sporting offerings, and one that is a popular tourist destination all year long, there are many excellent hotels around. But if you are shooting at Stuckeridge then we can't think why you and your team wouldn't want to stay at Loyton Lodge. Selected by *The Times* as one of Britain's best party houses, the lodge offers fully catered comfort, style and, of course, complete peace of mind for you, your teammates and your sporting firearms and canines.

loyton.com

CATERING



Aga produced feasts are served for lunch in the kitchen at Stuckeridge House where guns are warmly welcomed by owners and hosts Henry and Caroline Llewellyn. Classic shooting lunch dishes include venison, lamb, pheasant and ham pies, roast duck or goose. At elevenses the chef strives to use game as much as he can; whether serving barbecued pheasant burgers from the back of a converted Land Rover or proffering Scotch quail's eggs, pheasant goujons, rabbit and venison rillettes.