

# SOUTH AFRICA

## VINCE VANIA



*Dawn breaks over another exciting bird hunt in South Africa.*

About a year ago, Ian Head who is the director and operator for Wing Shooting Expeditions called to tell me of this fantastic hunt in South Africa that he was planning in July 2009. Ian explained that there would be a total of nine days shooting and hunting consisting of, Swanson Francolin over dogs, driven guinea fowl, geese, duck, sandgrouse, high volume dove & pigeon shooting and then to finish off with plains game hunting of choice. Can we fit all that in 9 days?

The day finally came! I was flying out of Sydney with Ian and fellow hunters John Pearson, Malcolm Webster and Andrew Veron. After a smooth 13 hour flight we

were met by our shooting party at the airport in Johannesburg. We introduced each other as most of us had never met.

When the firearms were finally cleared, we proceeded out of the airport where Fanus, who is the South African organiser and guide for the expedition, was waiting to meet and greet us with his minivan. We had a three and a half hour road trip to our hunting lodge in Pietersburg for 2 nights and to hunt the elusive Swainson Francolin over dogs.

The lodge is an African style chalet, very nice and comfortable indeed. There was a late dinner followed by drinks and then off to bed.

At 7 am breakfast was served and we were on our merry way to the location for our first walk up Francolin shoot! The weather was overcast and a brisk 8 degrees. It slowly warmed up to around 18 degrees then got colder again mid afternoon. Very similar to a typical Southern Australian winter season!

After walking for ten minutes we had all bagged one or two birds each. Just then we all heard and saw Malcolm, who was last in line to our left, shoot a perfect double. The double resembled a classic English pair and after all, Malcolm is English.

So much an Englishman that we were to learn that in England, Malcolm is known as



*After a successful grouse hunt the keen hunting party prepare to fly to their next destination and next great adventure.*



Next morning after a light breakfast, we shot walk up Francolin with the hounds and we had a great morning with more excellent shots to talk about. We had two handlers and four GSP dogs that were pointing and working perfectly.

After brunch there was an hour's drive to the local Pietersburg airport where a private aircraft awaited to take us to our next destination for two days of hot barrel dove and rock pigeon shooting. It was a little over a 2hr flight to Bloemfontein and it sure beat an 8hr drive.

The dogs and Slung, the dog handler, waved us goodbye at the airport as they were to meet us in Bloemfontein the next day with the hounds. Fanus departed with our luggage at 5am that day so he could meet us there with our transport when we touched down in the afternoon.

As planned, we were met by Fanus late that afternoon and we were whisked away to Haldon House in Bloemfontein. It was an old plantation home with heaps of character and lit open fireplaces in the lounge and dining rooms which gave it a great atmosphere.

Our hunt was in a sunflower field where the doves and rock pigeons came in their thousands upon thousands causing havoc and destruction. We were met there by Peter the organiser of the hot barrel shooting, his wife who was in charge of the catering and seven bird boys who were to be our helpers for the next six days. Fanus introduced all of us and then we all drew straws to determine our shooting locations.

In no time we were out there in the sunflower field with as many doves as I have ever seen and with the occasional flock of rock pigeons attempting to wing their way through our five man made blinds. The blinds were all set up in a row 75 metres apart. Shooting at these birds was very challenging indeed! Everyone was handed 250 shells to start with, cold drinks in an

Lord Malcolm. How's that, we were shooting with a real lord!

There were very few birds that got away that day and we all thoroughly enjoyed this type of shooting. A typical African lunch back at the hunting lodge was followed by more Francolin shooting till about 4pm. We managed an excellent bag for the day. After some photographs and congratulating each other on excellent shooting we set off home for a South African style dinner.



*Vince and John Pearson show off some of the Magellan geese they bagged on an afternoon hunt.*



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esky and a chair. Before long we worked out the leads and had birds falling out of the sky in all directions. We stopped for lunch which was set up just out of the sunflower field. It was a spectacular buffet of South African gourmet delights. What a lunch and great atmosphere!

We returned to our shooting again for the duration of the afternoon and stopped shooting at around 4pm as that is when most of the birds had gone back to roost. We took photographs of our carefully laid out birds which stretched about 15 meters and 20 birds wide! We were very satisfied with the day indeed. That is what I call hot barrel shooting at its best! We planned to do it all again the next day!



Out there again the next morning was the same amount of birds as the day before. Lunch was gourmet style brought to us in our hides complete with cold wine and beer. The late afternoon sun was quickly upon us and we knew it was time to pack up and take photos.

A two hour drive was ahead of us to Timkulu shooting lodge which is Fanus's hunting lodge in the Free State. All the bird boys and hounds followed behind. As we arrived at the front gate, we slowly drove through to the homestead and there we caught the sight of buffalo, zebra, springbok and many other native animals. The lodge staff met us with a glass of chilled champagne upon arrival.



The welcome that we received at this up market camp style lodge was something to see and experience. It was truly five stars even without electricity and was lit up by numerous kerosene lanterns everywhere, along with a glowing fire for us to enjoy and gather around. Dinner was served around the campfire. We discussed the coming day's hunts with eagerness and then retired early.

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*Rock pigeons were all over the sunflower crop and made for great hunting and fast shooting for the team.*



This day we were to shoot driven guinea fowl for the first time on our safari. "How will it go?" I wondered. After an hour's drive we arrived and everything was in place for us. The scouts had located the guinea fowl in the bush and were patiently waiting for the signal to start the two kilometre drive.

They would walk slowly through the bush twenty abreast, beating drums, singing and yelling. The air was filled with all this noise and African singing. In only a matter of time we all knew that the birds would be flushed to our waiting 12 and 20 gauge shotguns.

Sure enough the guinea fowl did not let us down. The flushed birds were coming towards us approximately 30 meters high, perfect shooting height. The shotguns barked several times back and forth along the line and then silence as the birds had passed over us to sanctuary behind us. The tally was good for our first drive.

We had another two fantastic guinea fowl drives after that at other locations and we all had some great shots at these majestic birds. As we had our first taste of this type of shooting, we were now all on target and enjoying driven bird shooting. Once again we ended up with a substantial bag for the morning.

That afternoon, three hours were spent shooting more rock pigeon, which proved to

be a success. We then packed up all the pigeon hides and set up geese silhouettes on the same property in the known flight path.

Everyone was in position about 20 minutes before dusk and then in they came from behind and in front. Many of them veered off just out of shotgun range. It was hard work shooting lying on your back with camouflage nets draped over you but we immensely enjoyed it and were happy with our bag of geese for the evening.

The next day we shot driven guinea fowl again like gentlemen in the morning, followed by a delectable lunch at the water dam wall complete with our own bon fire to add to the atmosphere. After lunch we shot rock pigeons for a short time and then we were on our way to shoot ducks in the late afternoon.

Well what a duck spot! Hundreds of ducks would fly over our dug out hides that were in natural bush and out of sight. The

ducks were flying to a large dam just 300 meters behind us. We all heard the ducks quacking and we had never heard or seen so many ducks in a dam at once, it was amazing as there must have been a thousand or so!

The dam is regularly fed with about 25 ton of maize all year round to ensure duck numbers are always at the optimum level for the duck season. It sure works! What a bag we shot, all within 60 minutes prior to night fall.

Next morning we were off to shoot driven guinea fowl again. We were getting used to this gentlemanly way of shooting. Brunch



*Whistling ducks filled the sky each morning.*

was then followed by; you guessed it, more rock pigeon shooting for the early afternoon. We all did very well with guineafowl and pigeon bags. In the late afternoon a duck shoot was planned at a new location. We all drew straws again to determine our hide positions and agreed that the drawing of straws to determine shooting positions is by far the best and fairest way for positioning shooters.

This duck spot was nestled in thick bush with a dam in it. Again it is fed with maize all year round to entice ducks in to feed. The ducks came at dusk but this time from all directions! Incoming, left and right, from behind, fast flying and low through gaps in trees. Mobs of 4 to 8 were always on the move. We had one of the best duck hunts ever and were truly satisfied with the variety and quality of the duck shooting. Drinks and dinner were enjoyed that night as we discussed the day's precision shooting.

After hunting some plains game it was time to leave Timkulu as the last two days of this wing shooting safari was at an exclusive resort style lodge named Tswalu. Here we would hunt sandgrouse for two mornings and go on various game viewing drives.



*The end of another great hunt!*

We arrived at this 5 star game park on dusk and well in time for a pre dinner drink and chat. After a restful sleep and breakfast, we were seated in an open 8 seat safari style Toyota being whisked away to our first location to shoot the elusive South African sandgrouse. There were permanent hides set up around 100 meters from a small dam.

What a morning shoot! These birds come to the water hole to soak up water in their feathers and then fly off to wherever they go with their feathers full of water. Sandgrouse fly in at around 9am till 10.15am then they are gone. I can tell you we had a lot of fun in that hour or so.

On the way back to Tswalu we took our time and viewed all kinds of animals that most of us hadn't seen before. For the remainder of the day we tracked rare white rhinos and black rhinos. What an incredible sight they are to see in the wild and as close up as you can possibly get.



*The party had a marvellous lunch after a wonderful mornings hunt.*

The next day was to be our last day and night in this wonderful country. We started the day, sandgrouse shooting in a different location and game viewing after lunch on the other side of the park.

All was quiet until late afternoon when our tracker who was seated in a chair on the vehicle's bull bar came across what we were looking for. Lion tracks in the dirt! After an hour or so we found the pride. The lions had fed the night before as there was a freshly killed half eaten antelope only about 100 meters from where they were sunning themselves. This was an incredible sight as the pride was only ten meters away.

Our last dinner was to be tonight. "What does our host Fanus have in store for us?" I wondered. We were not disappointed. After pre dinner drinks we followed dimly lit lanterns on a winding path from the Tswalu resort. There were about 12 lanterns that were set 50 meters apart.

These lanterns led us into an open circular bamboo area and inside this area, dinner was

set up with all the trimmings of a five star resort. Surrounding our dinner table was 5 small bonfires for us to keep warm and two chefs eagerly waiting our arrival for dinner to commence.

We learned that this open area is called 'boma' (British officers mess area). Very interesting indeed, I thought. I'm sure Lord Malcolm felt at home with these surroundings. As we sat, we could just hear the lions roaring in the distance. We sipped on great South African red wine and ate delicious food for our last night in this exciting country.

Next morning, we were off in the deep blue skies in a private aircraft to Johannesburg and then for a direct flight back home to our respective families who were anxiously awaiting our speedy return.

The hunting trip was class accommodation, quality shooting, great service and planned to perfection. Just ask Ian or Chris at World Class Game & Wingshooting Expeditions what they can put together for you.

