

# WINNING REPORTS

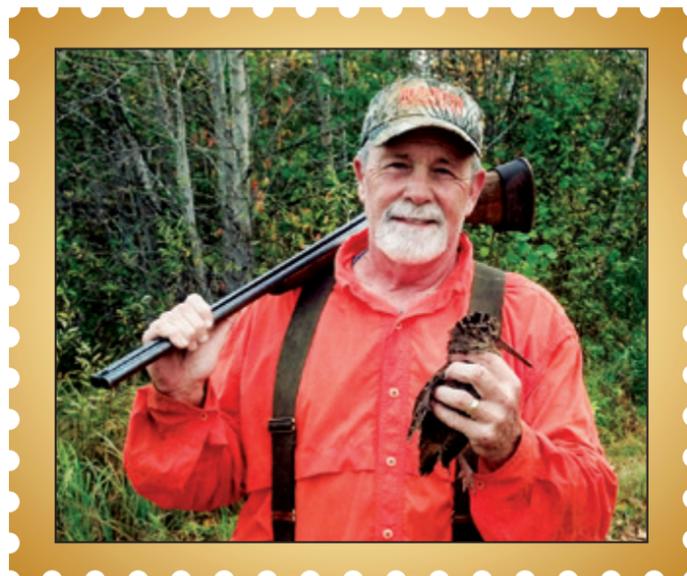
## WORDS FROM THE WINNERS OF OUR 25TH ANNIVERSARY SWEEPSTAKES

As you may recall, 2013 was *Shooting Sportsman's* 25th Anniversary year. As part of our celebration, we held a sweepstakes, in which we gave away 25 great prizes from some of the top brands in the wingshooting industry. The five grand prizes included a Caesar Guerini Woodlander shotgun and hunts at Cheyenne Ridge Signature Lodge, Pineridge Grouse Camp, WingHaven Lodge and Honey Brake Lodge. We asked the recipients of the grand prizes to let us know how they enjoyed their "winnings" last fall, and below are their reports.

### PINERIDGE GROUSE CAMP (REMER, MINNESOTA)

STEVE FABER

We arrived in camp just before midnight, after flying from Dallas/Ft. Worth to Minneapolis/St. Paul and finally to Bemidji, Minnesota. Thanks to Charles and his good driving, Shawn Price and I piled out of the vehicle into the North Woods tired, hungry and excited to try our hands at grouse and woodcock hunting for a couple of days. Owner Jerry Havel met us and led us to the lodge, where he provided some late-night snacks,



Steve Faber with the reward for his brush-busting efforts at Pineridge Grouse Camp.

a cold drink and the promise of birds the following morning.

The next morning we showered and headed to the lodge for breakfast. No Continental meal at Pineridge. They served coffee, a couple of juices, fresh fruit, bacon, ham, sausage, eggs any way you wanted them, biscuits, toast, gravy, jelly and jam. Table fare fit for a farmhand or lumberjack.

After breakfast Jerry loaded a pair of English setters and Shawn and me into his truck, and off we drove. As we traveled through the thick countryside, Jerry told us that he preferred timber tracts that had been logged about 10 years prior, because they seemed to provide the best grouse habitat and feed. Before bailing off into the thick timber, he advised us of a couple of things to keep in mind:

- Don't walk (he should have said crawl or slither)

through the woods looking at the ground in front of you. Look head high, because seeing grouse on the ground isn't likely, and that instant you catch a glimpse of the fleeting shadow of a grouse will be your *only* opportunity to "throw some lead" its way.

- Make absolutely certain you don't shoot a dog or a man. Working such thick cover requires that hunters know the whereabouts of their companions at all times. We assured Jerry that we would be extra cautious and take only safe shots.

Jerry belled an English setter named Al, put him on the ground, and we dove into the woods. The plan was to work the first section of timber, getting familiar with the idea of keeping a few yards from Jerry's flank as the dog worked close in front in a zigzag pattern. I struggled to keep my head erect, always looking for a fleeting ruffed grouse, while groping my way through the dense aspen, birch and spruce thicket. I sweated like a pack mule carrying a burdensome load. The mosquitos were as ferocious as any Texas Gulf Coast variety, and soon I had abandoned any thought of keeping my head up. I was struggling just to keep up, my gaze on the forest floor and my clothes soaked with sweat. I made a mental note to shuck my Filson Double Tin chaps when we returned to the truck. The briars were mere child's play compared to the greenbrier and cactus of my home state. Shawn managed to put a woodcock on the ground after both of us had heard but not seen many of these ghostly birds. After hearing the shot, I clawed my way to Shawn's and Jerry's location and found them admiring the little nondescript bird with the big black eyes and extraordinarily long beak. Back at the truck, I snapped a picture of Jerry, Al, Shawn and the bird.

We returned to camp, where Shawn and I each peeled off our soaked clothes and showered. The lodge thermometer read 82°. Jerry decided that we would wait until after 4 to return to the woods, so we had lunch and relaxed.

At 4:15 we pulled away from the lodge with guide Earl Johnson. The temperature was still in the high 70s, and the a/c in the truck felt refreshing. Earl drove us to a different covert than where we had hunted earlier.

We exited the coolness of the truck and embraced the heavy humidity and buzzing mosquitos. Bug-doped up, we dropped No. 8s into our tubes, latched them up and wormed our way into a different timber stand. Immediately, Lars, Earl's male dog, pointed a grouse and two woodcock. No birds were taken. By now my resolve to take a bird was turning into anger and resentment. I was officially "mad at them." We hunted on. I had another poke at a grouse and a woodcock. The difficulty this kind of hunting afforded was testing my metal. When I tried to swing on a rising bird, I immediately was reminded that I was trying to shoot in the midst of a jungle of popple. When I tried to shoulder my gun, I was thwarted by the thicket. When I kept my head up as I crashed through the brush, my feet became entangled in the dense covering on the forest floor. When I looked down to see where to step next, all I got for my trouble was the whisper of wingbeats as a grouse wove its way to safety.

I couldn't put it all together. Each shot was a pitiful attempt to "catch up" with birds that had the advantage and weren't afraid to use it. They were now thumbing their beaks at me and my inability to shoot effectively in this insane environment they called home. We came up for air, struck the hiking trail that led back to the truck and silently marched single file. No words were spoken. Once back at the truck, Earl put the big-running Lars in the kennel and collared a little female. We hunted another couple of hours, but the heat, mosquitos and

leaves mitigated against our hoped-for success.

We returned to camp empty-handed and "wore out." I stripped sweat-soaked clothing from my clammy body and took a shower. Revitalized, I headed for the lodge, a cold drink and some casual conversation with the gents who had just arrived from "Maar-lund." That night we dined on some of the best food I've ever tasted, thanks to talented Chef Matthew. I finished off the evening with a great cup of coffee and Kevin Burt's killer blues. He's an Iowa man who plays and sings the blues with a ton of soul right in the middle of northern Minnesota's grouse woods. Sweet dreams.

The next day we hunted with Tony, a retired Minnesota Highway Patrol officer and drug-dog trainer. Tony is a man of few words. On the way to our hunting spot I plied him with questions about his former life, but it would not be until we were heading home that evening that Tony would loosen up and really talk. We deployed Buzz, a shorn English setter, for the morning hunt. This dog was unbelievable. He hunted close, he hunted hard and he covered all of the ground wherever the three of us went. He found Shawn another woodcock, which Shawn said was laydown easy. I'd never killed a gamebird that I thought was a real gimme, so I assumed he'd just made another great shot in very difficult conditions. Buzz delivered the bird to Tony, and the morning was off to a great start in spite of the heat and bugs. We made a couple of passes through the thick stuff and worked our way back to the truck. By noon it was 77°, so we drove to camp to relax and cool off. I was feeling the pressure.

At 4:20 PM we loaded back up with Tony, and he took us to another new covert. This time he left Buzz in the kennel and put Woody on the ground. We hunted hard for a couple of hours, putting up a handful of woodcock and three grouse. I took a shot at one of the grouse to no avail. We waited out a little rain shower under a giant spruce, and then it happened. Woody nailed a bird. I walked it up and made the shot. God finally smiled on me, and Woody went to work to find the fallen bird. It was not a grouse, but it was a shot bird—and with my Daddy's 1964 Ithaca 20-gauge side-by-side. When Tony and I found Woody, he was rock solid on point again. I could see the bird on the ground, but Woody couldn't. His good nose told him the bird was very close, but he never saw it. "Good dawg, Woody!" I picked up my little woodcock; thanked Woody, Tony and the Lord; and our hunt was over.

We arrived at the lodge just before dark, cleaned up, ate and fellowshiped. The next day would start early and go long for me, as I was headed to Bend, Oregon, for a meeting before returning to Texas. I wasn't mad at the woodcock any longer, but the ruffed grouse had roughed me up something fierce. I would have to return to even the score.

Thanks to the folks at *Shooting Sportsman* for a great trip! Y'all have a beautiful magazine. Jerry, Tony and Earl, I'll be back for my grouse very soon.

For more information, contact Pineridge Grouse Camp, 218-301-6083; [www.pineridgegrousecamp.com](http://www.pineridgegrousecamp.com).