

# Sporting Chance

NEXT MONTH 30,000 PEOPLE WILL GATHER FOR BISLEY LIVE WHICH IS AIMED AT PUTTING SURREY BACK ON THE SHOOTING MAP. WE SENT OUR MAN CHARLEY PETERSEN ALONG TO BISLEY SHOOTING GROUND TO FIND OUT WHAT DRAWS PEOPLE TO THE SPORT

Since 1921 when the law was passed against the competition shooting of live pigeons for sport, clay shooting has been the way forward. And today Bisley Shooting Ground in Woking is the largest sporting clay ground in Europe, boasting 3,000 acres of breathtaking heathland split into two ranges, Cottlesloe Heath and Long Siberia. Passing through the main gate and up the long drive, it feels as though I have been transported back through time to the old Western movies we watched as children.

Dotted on each side are assortments of wooden buildings which cater for just about every need a shooter might have, from guns to clothing, equipment and more. Soon enough we find the colonial clubhouse which was originally built in 1865 on Wimbledon common and then rebuilt here 30 years later.

On entering we're greeted with a warm welcome and instantly feel at ease in the comfortable surroundings. Every wall is adorned with pictures of hunting parties and we have an opportunity to admire them, along with the large array of trophies and stuffed animals, while relaxing with a coffee on the large leather sofas.

We're shortly directed to the Long Siberia range which is just a short drive back out onto the main road, where we are met by our Instructor for the day, Sarah White, who gives a brief safety talk. Sarah has

been teaching at Bisley for four years now and is one of four full-time instructors.

No time is wasted and we are soon handed Beretta Silver Pigeon 12 bore shotguns and led to the practice stand where my colleague is first to show what he's made of. After being taught how to hold the gun and aim properly, we witness a demonstration of how the first clay will fly. The gun is loaded and we eagerly await the clay which a few seconds later appears above the tree line, maybe 50 feet away. To my surprise the clay explodes as he fires. He has his first 'kill' of the day. I let him know how delighted I am for him.

After a few more (mostly successful) shots it's finally my turn and the pressure is clearly on for me to perform equally as well. Unfortunately for my ego my aim isn't great and I miss the first few shots. Even with ear plugs I can hear the sniggering coming from behind my back; it is not a pleasant sound.

Eventually, with the benefit of further guidance from Sarah, I get my first kill. Despite how long it took me, the feeling is great as clay after clay smashes to pieces in front of my gun.

There are 30 different stands at Bisley. Each has between two and five traps simulating a number of different game from pheasants to teal, rabbits, grouse and partridges. The stands vary in difficulty and this becomes clear as the day goes on and the clays get faster and harder to hit. What started as a bit of fun and friendly competition soon gets serious as we try

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and out-shoot each other at every opportunity. Sarah continues to hone our skills.

My favourite stand of the day by far is the rabbit range where the clay is literally "rolled" out from the trap across the uneven ground to simulate the hopping run of the animal. Out of six shots I manage five 'kills' pushing myself back into the lead. However, my gloating doesn't last long as at the next stand we're presented with a smaller target. The standard 110mm clays we had been hitting so well are replaced with a "midi" 90mm target and it's soon clear that in this sport size really does matter.

Neither of us are able to hit the target which is not only harder to see but also flies faster. Happily Sarah can spot our mistakes easily and with a few more shots we once again feel like true shooters and the competition is back on. At least it's back on until once again our target is reduced in size to the "mini" clay. Even at just 60mm it's very difficult to hit as a beginner.

Over the course of our lesson we have the opportunity to try around 15 different stands and I lose count of how many shots we fire. The last stand of the day is an open range with five stands and as many traps. We are each handed a box of 24 shells and told to hit as many targets as possible. Basically it's a free for all as clays start appearing from every angle and we both try to bring them down before they fly out of view.

It takes a couple of pulls to get my bearings and decide on the clays I want to target, which pays off as more than once I manage to get a double 'kill' which works wonders for my slightly damaged ego. I quickly forget missing so many of the smaller clays earlier. Surprisingly the cartridges last longer than I initially thought although it's all over too quickly. I could happily have stayed there shooting for hours more.

This is the point at which I wish I had taken Sarah up on the offer of a pad for my shoulder which has become rather sore from the kick back of the gun. Trying to be macho doesn't always pay off!

The day has provided us with a great experience and I will certainly be back for more. And next visit I will say 'yes' to the shoulder pad. ☺

**Bisley Shooting Ground offers a range of different options for both the casual shooter and the hardened sportsman.**

**Check out the website [bisleyshooting.co.uk](http://bisleyshooting.co.uk) for more information or call 01483 797 017.**

Pictured: Shooting instructor Sarah White with her gun dog