



The buzz of Bisley

Learning to shoot clays, surrounded by beautiful countryside and the colonial charm of the world-famous shooting ground, proves to be an intoxicating combination for **Emma Roberts**



Pulling up outside the stunning Victorian clubhouse at Bisley Shooting Ground, you half expect Robert Redford to greet you in a battered fedora and a 12 bore over his shoulder. Alas not. Straight from the film *Out Of Africa*, this colonial clubhouse, originally built in 1865 on Wimbledon Common and rebuilt at Bisley in 1895, is a delightful reflection of days gone by.

Inside, the interior oozes charm. Deep green tongue and groove walls adorned with antlers, animal heads, stuffed game birds, sepia photographs of shooting parties and a trio of worn leather sofas huddle around a crackling log fire.

For well over a century a varied and colourful spectrum of people, including lords, ladies, celebrities and Royalty have enjoyed clay pigeon shooting at Bisley. Peering at the framed dog-eared sepia photographs adorning the walls, its history almost comes alive around you.

Over coffee my tutor, shooting manager John Heagren, talked me through the mechanics of the shotguns, all the safety aspects and what to expect around the course. John put me at ease straightaway. When we left the warmth of the clubhouse a late flurry of snow began to tumble about us as we crunched our way through the picturesque pine forests.

Bisley sits in 3,000 acres of outstanding heath land and forests. It is a breathtaking landscape, stretching as far as the eye can

see. Comprising of two grounds, Cottesloe Heath and Long Siberia, it has been described as the most beautiful shooting ground in the country. Established in the early 1990s, it was not until the turn of the century that Bisley developed into the largest sporting clay ground in Europe.

Throughout the course, there are several different stations for various different experiences of shooting the clays. Each station presents targets from trap machines. The clays are thrown as singles or pairs and at various angles and heights.

The targets used for the sport are usually in the shape of a little inverted saucer, made from a mixture of pitch and chalk, designed to withstand being thrown from traps at very high speeds, but at the same time being easily broken when hit by just a very few lead or steel pellets.

Usually black, but other colours such as white, yellow or fluorescent orange, the targets are frequently used in order that they can be clearly seen against varying backgrounds and conditions. The clay pigeon we know today originated in 1880 when the idea of a saucer-shaped target or 'clay' came to George Ligowski, after seeing children skimming flat stones across a lake.

With the addition of a ban on live pigeon shooting from traps in 1921, a number of British shooting schools began to adopt the use of clay targets to practice for driven-game shoots and clay pigeon shooting quickly became a hugely popular sport for both men and women.

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<<< Several types of targets are used for the various disciplines. However, only the standard 110mm target is used in all of the trap and skeet disciplines. There are a range of sizes:

Standard: The most commonly-used target of all, must weigh 105 grams and be of 110mm overall diameter and 25-26mm in height.

Midi: Same saucer shape as the standard, but with a diameter of only 90mm.

Mini: This target is sometimes likened to a flying bumblebee at only 60mm in diameter and 20mm in height.

Battue: A very thin, flat wafer of a target of about 110mm diameter which flies very fast and falls off very suddenly.

Rabbit: A standard sized (but thicker) flat target in the shape of a wheel designed to run fast along the ground.

ZZ: This is a plastic, standard-sized target attached to the centre of a two-blade propeller of different colour designed to zigzag in flight in a totally unpredictable manner.

Many of the terms today derive from the origins of live pigeon shooting. The word 'trap' – the mechanism used to propel the clay target – comes from the fact that it was the basket in which the pigeon would have been confined or 'trapped'. The call of 'Pull' is still the expression used to signal release of a clay target from the trap. In the past it referred to the action of opening the basket.

The Clay Pigeon Shooting Association, founded in 1928, is the national governing body for the sport of clay target shooting in England. Recognised by Sport England, the Department of the Environment, the Home Office and the Police, the CPSA is a constituent member of the International Clay Target Shooting Council, the International Clay Target Shooting Federation and the English Target Shooting Federation. Today, membership of the CPSA stands at 26,000 and there are over 500 CPSA clubs.

Adorned with earplugs, a metal shoulder pad and with my shotgun poised, I was ready. The sight of my first clay shattering in the wintry sky (admittedly after a couple of misses) was intoxicating to say the very least. John continued to monitor my shooting, keeping me focussed and relaxed, teaching me tactics, the correct stance and the right way to hold and load the gun.

I was quickly hooked. The rush of adrenalin and the buzz when you see a clay disintegrate is indescribably satisfying. I'll be back. ●

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Bisley Shooting Ground

Lessons are available seven days a week at Bisley Shooting Ground, Council Club, Bisley Camp, Brookwood, Woking GU24 0NY

Telephone: 01483 797017

Email: office@bisleyshooting.co.uk

Website: www.bisleyshooting.co.uk

Surrey Shooting Clubs

There are many shooting clubs and instructors. Here are a few:

- Blackdown Northchapel/Didling
Contact: 07770 777679
- Chadhurst Corporate Clay, Horley
Contact: Michael Brett on 0845 0568896 or 07771 991620
Email: mike@chadhurstcorporate.co.uk
- Country Pursuits, Cranleigh
Contact: John Simpson on 01403 751657
Email: office@countrypursuits.uk.com
Website: www.countrypursuits.uk.com
- Country Wide Special Events, Brook
Contact: Lisa Masters on 01428 682887
Email: info@cwse.co.uk
Website: www.cwse.co.uk
- Dunsfold Clay Pigeon Club, Alfold
Contact: Chris Wait on 01403 753875 or 07977 549525
Email: chris.wait@temple-legal.co.uk
- Gosterwood Sporting Clays, Forest Green
Contact: Les Edgar on 01306 621501
Email: ledgar@gosterwood.com
Website: www.gosterwood.com
- Guildford & District Gun Club, Woking
Contact: Peter Saich on 07947 259963
Email: chairman@guildfordgunclub.co.uk
Website: www.guildfordgunclub.co.uk
- Pennyhill Park Hotel & Spa, Bagshot
Contact: 01276 471774
Email: enquiries@pennyhillpark.co.uk
Website: www.exclusivehotels.co.uk
- Shamley Green Sporting Gun Club
Contact: David Harris on 01483 893972
- Tree Top Shooting Club, Haslemere
Contact: Paul Burnaud on 01428 652124
Email: info@treetopclays shooting.co.uk
- Weyburn Gun Club, nr Guildford
Contact: Andy Hale on 07979 095645
- Willinghurst Estate, nr Cranleigh
Contact: Ian Huggins on 07850 430462