

Casting and Blasting in the “Land of Infinite Variety” *South Dakota*

I have made this statement many times to people I know, “I have met a more interesting, fun groups of people , with more diverse backgrounds and interests with a shotgun in my hands behind versatile bird dogs than I have ever met though my employment or any professional organizations I am a member of.”. When we purchased our first Small Munsterlander, over 17 years ago as a hunting dog for my sons’, I never in a million years guessed I would be sharing hunting and fishing experiences with people all over the USA.

Bobbe Carney and Barb Krieger introduced me to ruff grouse hunting in Wisconsin. I now have total respect for anyone who hunts those birds and especially anyone who does it successfully! Hilda Sexauer and Dave Harper introduce me to sage grouse and mountain blue grouse hunting in Wyoming. They also helped me hone my ruff grouse hunting skills. Hilda and Dave added fly fishing as we floated the Green and Snake Rivers. This was a great treat and I found it gave the dogs and us a needed break, especially when we had been hunting hard for several consecutive days.

So to return the favors, I invited them to South Dakota to hunt across the state for multiple upland species with the added bonus of walleye fishing on the Missouri River. No body turned me down! I was a little concerned since even though I had hosted people pheasant hunting on my property before this was the first time I included hunting sharp tail and prairie chickens, and fishing. Also the weather that time of the year can change overnight. But so far that winter we had been bless with a warmer than normal weather pattern and no snow so at least that was in our favor.

The First Run---

The second week of November, Hilda and Dave their Small Munsterlander, Keta and Wirehairs, Gila and Tui, made the 14 hour drive to my home in southeast South Dakota. One of their purposes for making the trip was to get their 8 month old Wirehair Tui into a variety of terrain and habit and on as many birds as possible. The first day they arrived in time to hunt ½ day. It did not take Tui long to get into the swing and they were able to harvest several roosters over Tui’s points. That evening we had a local restaurant cook up some of the pheasants we had harvested earlier that day. It was a special treat! We hunted hard the next 2 days with fair success.



South Dakota wild roosters!

The third day, a beautiful sunny morning, I had to take care of some personal obligations so I met them at Noon. I found them cleaning birds with big smiles on their faces. They had limited, most over points, and they were elated. Wednesday we left for Pierre and arrived in time to hunt the afternoon in the Fort Pierre National Grasslands.



Dave in the Fort Pierre Grasslands

Birds were wild, as we suspected, but we were able to harvest pheasant, sharp tail grouse and prairie chicken all in the same pass.



LtoR Keta, Dave, Tui, Gila, Hilda



LtoR Sharptail, pheasant, Prairie Chicken

Thursday our fishing guide met us at the motel and we were on the river and fishing by 9:30 a.m. The walleye cooperated and in our first drift we landed several nice 15 inchers and had numerous bites.



Hilda bringing in supper



L to R Hilda, Mike(guide), Dave

By noon we had our limit and by 1:00 pm. were headed out to try the Grasslands for more birds. That evening a local restaurant cooked up some of our walleyes. They were delicious! The next morning we headed further west to hunt my brother's pastures south of Phillip for sharp tails. The drought had taken its toll but we were able to find a few birds.



Taking a break from grouse hunting near Phillip



Hilda after grouse on edge of Badlands

We spent the night in Wall and had breakfast at Wall Drug (good caramel rolls) before Hilda and Dave departed for home. By hunting our way to the western side of the state we were able to shorten their drive home by four hours. We were successful in getting Tui into a fair number of different types of upland birds. She went home a lot more mature than when she arrived. Everything had gone pretty smooth and I relaxed some.

Same song---Second verse---Just in Reverse---

We had targeted Bobbe, her Small Munsterlanders, Britta and Beans, and Barb and her Flat Coat Retrievers, Lace and Chat, South Dakota cast and blast adventure for the first week of December. This was Barb's first trip to South Dakota to bird hunt and fish so I hoped it would be unforgettable. Barb was also bringing a dog that had not seen much wild bird exposure and she

was excited to get her into good numbers of birds. We had been watching the weather and it looked like we would have the best two days to fish and hunt in the Pierre area at the beginning of their stay. So, we agreed to meet at the Fort Pierre Motel in Fort Pierre Friday night and fish Saturday morning. Everything was set except Friday afternoon while I was cleaning pheasants, we had harvested at my place, with friends from R-Place Kernel the battery light in my pickup came on and by the time I drove the mile home the lights were not work and I drove in the dark. I quickly called the repair shop and they could look at it right away Saturday morning. Another call to the fishing guide and Bobbe and Barb and everything was arranged. The guide would take care of Barb & Bobbe and hopefully my truck would be fixed and I would get to Pierre in time to do some fishing with them Saturday morning. It was a good thing the service manager was a hunter and fisherman. When I arrived I explained the situation and a new alternator was installed. I was on the road to Pierre within an hour. Guess I'll keep doing all my business there!

By the time I arrived at Pierre they had already caught a fair number of fish. I was able to spend a couple hours fishing with them and we had a blast.





The fish slayers

Later in the afternoon we hunted an area in the grasslands for a few hours but saw very few birds. At least we were able to work the energy off the dogs in preparation for the next day. The next morning over breakfast we reviewed my maps and discussed my experience there a few weeks before and Bobbe's earlier in the season. We agreed on an area to hunt that day and we were off. On the way to the selected area we saw a lot of grouse fly from harvested crop fields into the area we were to hunt. Ask me if we were excited? We parked, got organized and had not gone 100 yards before we had the first prairie chicken in the bag. The rest of the day was almost like we were in a dream. Please understand, it was December in South Dakota, grouse season had been open since September and the fact that we were finding singles and doubles and small flocks of 10 to 20 birds and getting close enough to shot was AMAZING.



Success on the Grasslands, both Prairie Chickens and Sharptail Grouse

It was a beautiful sunny day with the temperature in the 50's and a slight breeze and we kept finding birds! Now the marksmanship left something to be desired but the dogs and the birds cooperated. We all hunted in different directions but every time we go back together we kept telling Barb that this was truly an exceptional day and not to expect this type action on a regular basis especially this late in the season. By the end of the day I believe Barb was hooked on hunting prairie grouse.



Barb & Lace in the Grasslands

The next day, Monday, the wind blew so hard we hunted lower areas and shot a couple pheasants. The pheasants were concentrated in the cattails around dams. Their route of escape seemed to always be across the water. Every rooster we shot that day was retrieved from the water.



Versatile Dogs!

Good thing we were hunting with versatile dogs. Tuesday morning we headed for my home area in eastern South Dakota to concentrate on pheasants. That afternoon we hunted pheasants in an area that had not had much hunting pressure.





Barb hunting pheasants in eastern South Dakota



Bobbe moving in for the flush

Barb harvested her first South Dakota rooster on a beautiful, calm, sunny day. We continued to check the weather and it looked like we had two decent days before the season's first snow storm was to hit. We spent Wednesday and Thursday hunting my property and the property of a close friend of mine. We were successful both days. The last day was especially nice 40's, sunny and a slight breeze.

In the middle of the afternoon, of the last day, as we were hunting a large CRP field. Bobbe's SM Britta entered a cattail area and all of a sudden all hell broke loose. I was over the hill and as I ran back up over the hill I saw a massive 5x5 white tail buck come out of the cattails. His back leg was swinging (Rifle deer season had ended the previous Sunday). I did not see Britta, but watched the buck until he was out of sight over the hill. I found Bobbe frantically calling and looking for Britta. Britta had experience tracking and finding wounded deer for bow hunters in the past. We could not find her or hear her peeper collar. We searched that slew area and called for a half and hour. We really did not want to find her in the cattails; we feared if we had it would not be good. Finally we decided to walk in the direction I had seen the buck run. As it turned out Barb had parked her van near the area I had last seen the deer and when we got close to the van (about a ¼ mile from the fight) we could hear Britta's collar beeping and found her laying by the van, not a scratch on her. Relieved?---Yes! We were elated!



Not a bad day pheasant hunting in South Dakota

Barb, made this comment the end of the last day, “I am not taking home the same dogs I came with.” My thought was—mission accomplished! Early Friday morning, Bobbe & Barb took off for home and by late afternoon we had 4 inches of snow on the ground, temperatures were dropping, the wind was picking up and by early Sunday morning we were in the season’s first blizzard and the interstates were closed.

For both groups the weather was reasonable, the late season bird numbers adequate (a variety of species and varying cover and terrain to hunt) and the walleye fishing a nice break and great eating!!! There was a mention of, “It would be nice to do this again sometime?” I think they are hooked on bird hunting in the “Land of Infinite Variety” – South Dakota!

As a side note on the Friday Bobbe & Barb left I received a text early afternoon from some local friends asking if I wanted to hunt ducks with them that afternoon. I had not been able to hunt with them all fall, a snow storm was coming, there were a lot of ducks in the area and they had the decoys set up in a field were large numbers had been feeding. Wild horses could not have kept me away! By mid-afternoon when the ducks started to fly the snow was coming down pretty hard and it was unbelievable.



Get ready!



Kody making retrieve



Eight year old Nicollus helping out. Cannot start them too young.



What a day!

We shot a few Canada geese and our limit of 25 drake mallards in 1 ½ hours. In one seven day period in South Dakota I caught walleyes and shot sharp tailed grouse, prairie chickens, pheasants, mallards and Canadian geese. I am sure there are other states you can do this same thing, but I don't think there are many? "The Land of Infinite Variety"--- Incredible ----and one of the reason I hunt with versatile dogs!