

Lady Jean Fforde of Isle of Arran Kennels – An Appreciation by Jon Kean

Herewith a tribute to Lady Jean Fforde who has passed away on 13th October 2017, 3 weeks before her 97th birthday by Jon Kean

I first met Lady Jean in the 1970s – appropriately enough it was on the grouse moors in Perthshire. Janette and I were there just to spectate at the field trial and find out more about working Pointers and Setters. Lady Jean immediately put us at ease and explained what was happening at the trial. My one abiding memory from that day was the unusual footwear Lady Jean sported. It was a pair of sandals (baseball type) with the words “Skateboard City” emblazoned on the side. Her great friend Mrs Patience Badenoch Nicolson was there too. Their guidance inspired me to find out more about working Pointers.

From that day, friendship developed and I learned so much from Lady Jean and Patience about working Pointers. After a while, I asked Lady Jean if it would be possible to purchase an Isle of Arran Pointer. My wish was granted! In historical terms, the Pointer kennels were among the first, if not the first, to be registered by her grandfather at the Kennel Club when it was formed. In 1983, I brought back from Arran two male puppies from Lady Jean’s litter, sired by Moanruad Aron (the late John Nash’s Pointer) and Isle of Arran Neillia (litter sister of the 1981 Champion Stake winner FT CH Isle of Arran Larch, handled by Mrs Marcia Clark). I reared Isle of Arran Micha and the brother Isle of Arran Gideon was bought by Duncan Davis from the North of England. The rest, as they say, is history. Gideon duly became a field trial Champion and Micha (pet name Duke) won the Champion Stake at Bollihope Moor in County Durham in 1989. Duke was a fantastic Pointer for our

shooting trips to Garrogie Estate, owned by Charles Connell in Invernesshire. Apart from his game finding ability, Duke's great attribute was his stamina and endurance. He had the strength of 3 dogs.



Lady Jean Fforde and Jon Kean – Champion Stake 1989

Lady Jean and Patience were hugely influential people in the Pointer world. They were always willing to help and offer advice to anyone interested in working gundogs. One day, I was called aside for an informal chat. Lady Jean told me: "Patience and I both agree that you need to put something back into the sport. We think you should take on the role of Honorary Secretary of the Scottish Field Trials Association." I was duly appointed in 1986 and have done the job of Secretary for the Pointers and Setters ever since.

Looking back, there were many famous Pointers with the Isle of Arran prefix. The list is endless – Isle of Arran African Queen, Scotney Isle of Arran Regent, Isle of Arran Juno, FT CH Scotney Isle of Arran Jack, Isle of Arran Minoru, FT CH Isle of Arran Dice, Isle of Arran Lilly. Lady Jean's favourite was FT CH Isle of Arran June, a beautiful orange and white bitch. In Lady Jean's memoir, she wrote: *"June became the dog of my life – I adored her! Considering she was the first dog of any kind I had trained myself, she was a miracle. I trained her by phoning Patience Nicolson week by week, and asking for instructions."*

Lady Jean was President of the Pointer Club of Scotland since it was founded many years ago. She had many, many interests outwith the world of field trials. She was a keen gardener, for example. Her parents brought back many rare plants from their trips throughout the world. On our visits to Strabane, her home at Brodick, Lady Jean gave us a guided tour of the gardens. On one visit, Lady Jean told us she would be sending her friend to collect us from the ferry at Brodick. The friend just happened to be Richard Todd, the Oscar-nominated actor best known for war dramas like *The Hasty Heart*, *The Dam Busters* and *The Longest Day*.

She was also involved with the RNLI and the Red Cross. She was an artist. Lady Jean wrote fascinating memoirs – *Castles in the Air* and *Feet On the Ground – From Castles to Catastrophe*. In those books, we discover she spent part of her life in India, Palestine, Sierra Leone, Northern Rhodesia and of course her beloved Isle of Arran. It was at the Government Code and Cypher School at Bletchley Park that Lady Jean joined the army of women who cracked the German code to save countless lives and shorten the war by at least two years.

Lady Jean's mother was very keen on taking cine films of life on Arran, which included stalking and shooting over Pointers on the island from the 1930s onwards. A couple of years ago we spent a lovely afternoon in Strabane viewing some of the reels of film, and they are fascinating to watch.

Lady Jean sent me a gift of the book called *Training Setters and Pointers for Field Trials*, by Professor John Beazley, Alf Manners and Arnold White-Robinson. It is signed : *"To Jon. Wishing You every luck in field trials with your puppy. Jean Fforde 1981."* I have used this book as a guide for seminars ever since.

In 1982, Lady Jean asked me to show her Champion Stake winner, Larch, at Crufts in London. This I duly did and was thrilled when the Judge Mrs Kitty Edmondson awarded a prize to Larch.

Unbeknown to me, Lady Jean's best friend , Princess Antoinette of Monaco, was a surprise visitor at the ringside at Crufts.

I will always have great memories of Lady Jean. Our last visit to Lady Jean was in July this year. She was in good spirits and very keen to hear news from the world of Pointers. RIP Lady Jean.

Still curious about British trials? Check the section A Month on the Moor or [click here](#).

Between Dogs and Grouse (Sentieri di Caccia November 2016)

Between Dogs and Grouse – Originally Published in Sentieri di Caccia – November 2016

Disclaimer: This is the first of a series of articles I wrote for the Italian press. I wrote this article for Italian readers, this means that British people are not going to learn anything new from these pages and, whereas I did my best to be accurate, they may even find some inaccuracies. If so, please notify me.

[I cannot tell when it all began](#). When I was a little child I used to refuse milk and kept begging for tea for tea to be put in my bottle, no wonder I could not sleep! At the age of four, I was given a Scottish kilt and a book on Queen Elizabeth, I

still treasure both. At six, I began studying English and at 11 I asked for an English Setter. The setter came many years later, together with a master degree in British Literature. It was the Setter though, and not the books, that made me aware of the art of shooting over pointing dogs, of field trials and more. A mosaic tile, however, was still missing. I love the English Setter and I am sincerely happy that it is so popular in Italy (12.000 puppies were registered in 2015) but, at the same time, I have mixed feelings about how it is perceived, trained and bred by my fellow countrymen. The same happens when it comes to field trials. I have always felt there was something else, something hidden, something to be discovered. I was "feeling" rather than "thinking", there was nothing rational about my perception. In July 2015, however, I had the opportunity to watch the Champion Stake and it gave me some little pieces of evidence that proved my emotional beliefs were right. I was not crazy, just a little odd, and there was a whole new world ready to be explored: British pointing dogs could be trained and used in a different way.

Once back home, I began training my dog according to what I saw. My training style was perceived by the Italians as "different" and more traditional, a very polite way to tell me it was outdated. The method I chose forced me to work hard but at a slow pace, I did not see any fruits until spring 2016. My original plan was very modest: I was going to use the British "enlightenment" to prepare Briony for Italian Field Trials, in the meantime I would have gone back to the UK to watch more trials and learn more. Things, however, took an unexpected twist which made me change my plans: in April the dog suddenly became very reliable and, one day, while I was driving back from the training grounds a light bulb went on: why not to go back with her and compete?



Briony, setter inglese di proprietà di Rosella Di Palma, in guida durante il suo primo censimento a Muggleswick

È difficile dire quando tutto abbia avuto inizio. Ricordo solo che da bambina rifiutavo il latte e che il mio liberico era invece pieno di tè, forse per questo non dormivo mai. All'età di circa quattro anni mi hanno regalato un kilt e un libro sulla Regina Elisabetta, conservo ancora entrambi, a sei ho iniziato il mio primo corso d'inglese. A 11 anni volevo un setter inglese tutto per me e qualche anno dopo lo ho avuto, insieme a una laurea in lingua e letteratura inglese. Grazie al mio primo setter ho scoperto la caccia con il cane da ferma, la cinofilia venatoria e molto altro. Però un pezzo del mosaico continuava a mancare. Adoro il setter inglese come cane da ferma e la sua popolarità in Italia mi rende felice, d'altra parte non condivido alcuni metodi di utilizzo nostrani e, alla stessa stregua, ho sentimenti misti nei confronti delle nostre manifestazioni cinofile. Da sempre avevo la sensazione che ci fosse dell'altro da scoprire. Nel luglio di 2015 ne ho avuto la conferma: sono riuscita ad assistere al Champion Stake inglese (la prova di eccellenza per setter e pointer) e mi si è aperto un mondo nuovo sull'utilizzo e sull'addestramento dei cani da ferma britannici. Una volta rientrata in Italia ho cominciato a lavorare il cane alla luce di quanto avevo visto lassù. Era, il mio, un tipo di addestramento diverso da quello che siamo abituati a vedere, più "tradizionale" probabilmente e più lento nel mostrare i suoi frutti che, tuttavia, come ogni buon raccolto, hanno iniziato a spuntare in primavera 2016. In tutta franchezza il mio obiettivo era semplicemente quello di preparare il cane per le prove italiane e, nel frattempo, tornare in Inghilterra come semplice osservatore per continuare ad apprendere, ma le cose hanno poi preso una piega diversa. Dallo scorso aprile, Briony ha fatto grandi progressi e, un giorno, mentre rientravo dalla zona C mi si è accesa una lampadina: perché, anziché andare a vedere i cani altrui impegnati in prova, non partecipare alle competizioni con la mia setter?

La caccia con il cane da ferma: solo per pochi

Per meglio comprendere le prove di lavoro britanniche è necessario avere qualche nozione sulla situazione faunistica locale e sul tipo di lavoro che è normalmente richiesto ai cani da ferma. Mi limiterò a parlare di cani da ferma britannici (i quattro setter e il pointer) e di grouse. Alcune persone mi hanno chiesto informazioni sull'utilizzo dei continentali sulle grouse e se ci siano prove di lavoro su questi selvatici anche per loro. Sì, esistono alcune prove di lavoro su grouse anche per i continentali, ma sono diverse da quelle per inglesi e vengono proposte in numero ridotto, nonché dopo il 12 agosto, giorno di apertura della caccia alla grouse. Quanto all'utilizzo dei continentali, dal vivo ho visto solo un drabhaar allenarsi su un moor, per il resto solo fotografie e video ma, perdonatemi, l'opinione molto franca e poco diplomatica: trevo i cani da ferma continentali fuori luogo in quel contesto! Non mette in dubbio le loro capacità venatorie, anzi, ma non riesco ad accettarli in quel passaggio e con quella funzione, mi fanno lo stesso effetto che mi farebbe un setter inglese intento a riportare una volpe saltando recinzioni. In Gran Bretagna c'è un crescente interesse nei confronti dei cani da ferma continentali, che loro chiamano HPR (Hunt Point & Retrieve), ma il rischio meglio impiegabili sul fagiano o su altri selvatici. Devo poi dichiarare che la caccia con il cane da ferma, in Gran Bretagna, è praticata da pochissimi appassionati. Per gli italiani il cane da ferma è il cane da caccia per eccellenza, per noi è normale uscire di casa con cane e facile e andare a cercare un fagiano, una beccaccia o una lepore, per un inglese questa condotta è molto insolita. I britannici chiamano il nostro modo di andare a caccia rough shooting e sono pochissimi i cacciatori che lo praticano. Forse non è tradizione e, forse, la loro legislazione venatoria non agevola tale pratica: per accedere a un terreno di caccia occorre il permesso

del proprietario (che è titolare della selvaggina) e i luoghi in cui si trovano generalmente i selvatici sono riserve di caccia private, a cui a volte è possibile accedere a pagamento. Ho scritto "a volte" perché non tutte le riserve di caccia sono aperte al pubblico, in alcune cacciano solo i proprietari. L'accesso a una riserva, inoltre, non è legato semplicemente al denaro: la gestione e l'attività venatoria sono organizzate da ciascuna riserva in maniera piuttosto rigida, il che fa sì che possano decidere se ammettere, o meno, un certo tipo di cliente. Alcune riserve, per esempio, praticano solo lo shooting (caccia in battuta all'inglese) e non prevedono alcun tipo di caccia con il cane da ferma: ho avuto modo di allenare in Kent in una riserva dove un setter inglese non aveva mai corso, starnè e fagliani lì si cacciano solo in battuta. In altre riserve, soprattutto in Scozia, è prevista anche la caccia con il cane da ferma, ma i soggetti impiegati vengono procurati dalla riserva stessa, non è previsto che un cacciatore porti il suo cane. Non è impossibile in assoluto ma, fonte la mia esperienza, sono accettati solo eventuali cani conosciuti e ritenuti "sicuri". I cinofili italiani sono abituati ad andare a caccia all'estero con il proprio cane e in alcune nazioni vi sono riserve e strutture organizzate proprio per questo scopo; nel Regno Unito è diverso. Esiste il turismo venatorio, ma è mirato al cacciatore più che al cinofilo. Come deve essere un cane per poter cacciare in Gran Bretagna? Per i britannici il controllo sul cane è vitale. Il cane deve essere corretto al frullo, deve eseguire un terra (o un seduto) a comando, deve seguire le indicazioni del conduttore e deve rientrare quando chiamato. Vi sono territori in cui la densità di selvatici è tale da rendere indifferente un cane simile. Dove si cacciano le grouse ci sono spesso moltissimi conigli (Inghilterra) e lepri (Scozia), greggi di pecore (che il cane deve ignorare) e può capitare anche dell'altro... Le grouse

stesse più in Inghilterra che in Scozia sono molto numerose, una covata può distribuirsi in pochi metri quadrati ed essere seguita da un'altra covata, vicinissima. Un cane non corretto al frullo e non perfettamente sotto controllo diventa ingestibile e può ostacolare il lavoro di tutela dei selvatici messo in atto dai guardiacaccia. Vi sono condizioni faunistiche dei territori italiani, è difficilissimo preparare un cane come pretendono dai cacciatori d'Oltre Manica, lo ha dedicato quasi un anno all'obbedienza ferrea, ci sono riuscita, ma è stato estremamente impegnativo.

La grouse viene prima di tutto

La differenza nei confronti dei cani è legata al grande rispetto per i selvatici. Il guardiacaccia ha il potere assoluto sul territorio e il suo primo pensiero è tutelare la selvaggina. Se parliamo di grouse, esse nascono e si riproducono in natura, non sono allevabili, il loro ciclo di vita è intimamente legato al clima e al territorio. Il lavoro del guardiacaccia comincia in primavera con i continenti dei riproduttori, continenti che possono essere ostacolati da difficili condizioni climatiche. È proprio il clima a essere la prima minaccia per la grouse: quest'anno, per esempio, ha fatto relativamente poco freddo in inverno, ma ci sono state nevicate primaverili e poi molta pioggia, eventi che in talune zone della Scozia hanno decimato il numero dei naschi nati. Ogni moor è curato dal guardiacaccia (o meglio da uno staff di guardiacaccia) come un giardino: si effettua il controllo dei predatori, si organizza la presenza del bestiame, si pianifica la bruciatura degli appezzamenti di erica, il tutto per garantire all'anatra grouse le migliori condizioni ambientali. Il tutto è curato nel dettaglio e spesso sono piccole astuzie a fare la differenza: una riserva che aveva avuto problemi di scoche (hades



Dennis Longworth durante un censimento a Eggleston

Only a few: shooting over pointing dogs

To better understand British Field Trials, it is useful to know something about indigenous wildlife management and about how pointing dogs are worked. The information you are about to read relate only to grouse and British pointing breeds, things for HPRs (Hunt Point Retrieve/Continental Pointing Dogs) are slightly different. People asked me about HPRs and grouse: there are grouse trials for them as well, but they take place during the shooting season. The only HPR I saw working on a moor was a GWP (German Wirehaired Pointer): she was fine, but I cannot get used to the sight of a HPR running in the heather. I know I am not going to be politically correct here but... these dogs look out of place! I am sure they can work grouse properly, but they do not belong to this world. The sight of an English Setter jumping fences with a fox in his mouth would trigger in me the same feelings. In Britain the interest in HPRs is increasing, and I am sure they would do very well on pheasant and other game. Shooting over pointing dog, however, is fairly uncommon.

Italian hunters are crazy about pointing dogs: the average hunter here owns one or more pointing dogs and leaves the house alone in the morning, a dog and a shotgun are his only company. They hope to bag a pheasant, a woodcock or maybe a hare: British people hunting in this manner (they call this rough shooting) are fairly scarce. Why? I do not know, maybe it does not belong to their tradition and perhaps the legislation discourages this. In the UK, the game belongs to the landowners (in Italy wild animals are considered a public good – we have private estates but 90% of hunting/shooting takes place on “common ground”) and to hunt on these grounds you need the landowner permission. Furthermore, most of the places in which you can find birds suitable to pointing dogs are private estates. Some of these estates accept paying clients, but can be selective on which customers to allow on their grounds: money is important, but proper game and land management are even more important and are therefore strictly regulated. Most of the estates offer shooting days (with beaters, pickers up and shooters), but are not organized to offer shooting days over pointing dogs. Before coming back to Italy last summer, I stopped in Kent and through a friend, I had the opportunity to run Briony on grounds belonging to a local estate. Well, she was the first English Setter who had put her paws on these grounds, they only offer formally organized shooting days with spaniels and retrievers. Scotland is slightly different, as some estates organize grouse shooting over pointing dogs, but the dogs at work are selected by the estate and professionally handled: it is uncommon to see shooters bringing their own dogs. I am not stating it cannot be done but, from what I could gather, gamekeepers allow only “safe” (well trained and obedient) dogs on their grounds. Italian shooters like to go abroad for hunting holidays with their dogs, I think British hunting tourism focuses more on men than on dogs.

How should a pointing dog behave to please the average British gamekeeper? The Brits want their dogs to be under control. A dog MUST be steady to flush, drop on command, obey orders and

come back when recalled. These skills are vital if you run a dog on grounds rich in birds, rabbit, hare, sheep and maybe something else. Grouse are abundant, a whole covey can be scattered in a few square metres, followed closely by another one: a dog unsteady to flush, who likes chasing birds, would be a nightmare. Unfortunately, due to the lack of birds Italian dog lovers have to face, is very hard to train a dog to be biddable in these conditions. I eventually succeeded, but I spent one whole year working on obedience, it was incredibly demanding.

Cani da caccia



ricinus - la stessa zecca che può trasmettere la malattia di Lyme - ha usato le pecore come raccogliatrici di zecche: in pratica venivano mandate in zone infestate, in modo tale che le zecche si attaccassero agli ovini e potessero poi essere uccise con dei trattamenti sugli animali. Il controllo delle zecche è importante, perché possono trasmettere patogeni letali per le grouse. In primavera, come già detto, vengono censiti i riproduttori e in estate si rifanno censimenti per aver chiaro il numero dei capi in vista della stagione venatoria. Per censire vengono normalmente utilizzati i cani da ferma, alcune riserve analizzano anche i segni di presenza degli animali, come lette e altro. I cani impiegati nei censimenti sono soggetti "fidati", in mano a conduttori "fidati", ovvero persone che hanno il cane sotto controllo. Alcune aziende organizzano i censimenti in maniera molto formale e a volte, a fronte di una richiesta di impegno notevole, pagano i cionofili che conducono i cani, riconoscendo la professionalità. In altre realtà, i censimenti

sono meno formali e vengono svolti su base volontaria. L'incaricato sa di dover controllare un dato territorio in un dato periodo, ma vi è più elasticità su tempi e modi. I cionofili sono molto contenti di poter censire gli animali, anche senza retribuzione, poiché i censimenti consentono di addestrare ed allenare i cani. In alcuni casi si presenta un guardiacaccia che aiuta a contare i capi individuali e segna su apposite mappe i punti in cui sono stati trovati. In altri contesti invece, il cionofilo è solo e ha la responsabilità di annotare tutto. In entrambi i casi tuttavia, i censimenti vengono presi molto sul serio: la persona a cui è affidato il compito può, a volte, portare con sé altri conduttori e altri cani, ma sotto la sua totale responsabilità. Ho avuto il piacere e l'onore di partecipare ad alcuni censimenti. La prima giornata si è svolta a Meg-gleswick, sotto la responsabilità di Steve Robinson che allena, addestra e conduce setter irlandesi. In mattinata e in presenza del guardiacaccia,

1 Eggleston, Briony in ferma. Terry Harris controlla l'operato di cane e conduttore

2 La grouse si riproduce solo in libertà e in un piano di abbattimento "sbagliato" può compromettere più di una futura stagione di caccia



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Larger photo by Maria Jacques

Grouse come first

Gamekeepers, those who rule on shooting grounds with absolute power, tend to be wary of dogs because... love their birds and want to protect them. Grouse are wild birds, they reproduce in wilderness and cannot be artificially reared. Their life cycle is intimately linked to climate and grounds. In spring the gamekeepers are busy counting adults birds which are going to

mate. Difficult weather conditions in the spring can hinder the counts and, most of all, decimate births. Winter 2015, for example, was fairly mild but spring 2016 brought snow and much rain: these conditions negatively affected the newborns. Each moor is being cared by a group of gamekeepers: they pay attention to pest management; organize sheep presence; plan heather burning and more. A newcomer might think that moors naturally look like the way they do they but, in reality, moors are not so different from gardens and their features are the results of proper care. Small details can make a difference: an estate that was infested by ticks (*Ixodes ricinus* ticks, those that carry Lyme Disease) minimized its problem through sheep. Sheep were sent grazing on the infested areas, they picked up the ticks which later died thank to the products applied on the sheep. Removing, or at least reducing tick presence, on the moor is important as these arthropods they can infect grouse with deadly diseases.

In the spring, as already mentioned, producer birds are counted and in the summer other counts are carried out to assess the number of young birds: estates need to know the number of birds to plan the shooting season. Pointing dogs are often used to count birds, some estates also take in account "presence signs" such as grouse faeces and so on. Only biddable dogs are used for counting, they are trustworthy dogs, handled by trustworthy handlers. Some counts are very formal and demanding, therefore the handlers get paid; other estates have a more laidback approach and accept volunteers: they are given specific area to work on, but the counting schedule is less tight and more flexible. Dog lovers are really happy to go counting as this allows them to train the dogs and let them gain more experience on grouse. Sometimes handlers work in team with gamekeepers who take note of the birds found, placing them on the estate map. Some other times the dog handler has to do everything by himself but, in both cases, grouse counting is taken extremely seriously. Dog handlers can sometimes take other people with them, but they are deemed responsible for their friends (and their dogs!)

behaviour. I am very happy to be able to write that Briony and I were allowed to go counting! It was an honour and a dream coming true. My first count took place at Muggleswick Estate, with Steve Robinson, who breeds and handles Irish Setters, supervising me. In the morning I followed him while he was handling his Irish Setters. Briony was kept on lead so that she could become familiar with grouse (she had never met any before) in a safe setting: as grouse always come first, we had to be sure she would not grab any young chicks. After hours of good behaviour, in the afternoon, she was allowed to work off lead cooperating with some new dogs. There were Steve Robinson Irish Setters, some Pointers owned by Terry Harris, Maria Jacques and Roy Heath; a Gordon Setter owned by Nicky Harris and, finally, a smart English Setter pup handled by John Naylor. I have to admit that these people were trusting my dog more than I was doing. It was nice feeling, they made me feel welcome and accepted. Briony did well, she was very gentle and careful with birds and thanks to this I was allowed to go counting again! On the following days, indeed, Terry Harris, a reputable Pointer and Gordon trainer, took us to Eggleston Estate and carefully monitored our work. There were his Pointers and his Gordons with us and sometimes some English Setters belonging to Dennis Longworth, Anne Maddison and John Naylor. Dennis Longworth, despite being "already" 83, is in wonderful shape and has a very sharp mind: he spent his life with pointing dogs and loves English Setters. It is a real pleasure to listen to his tales, opinions and advice. As said earlier, gamekeepers are really concerned about dogs behaviour during the counts and Terry Harris guaranteed for us: if a dog misbehaves during a count (or even during a trial) it could be banned forever from a specific ground! Things for us were going well and I was invited to go counting in Scotland too but, unfortunately, a kennel cough epidemic made this great opportunity vanish. Nevertheless, two gamekeepers, Brian at Dorback Estate and Craigh at Tollishill Estate kindly allowed me to train on their grounds sending me to the best "places". Brian even spent a couple of hours with me in the rain

enjoying working with Briony... she seemed to like him more than me!

Canidascacia



If you have read the whole article, it should be now very clear that grouse come first and that its preciousness makes gamekeepers wary about “unknown” dogs. Nowadays it is easy to travel to UK with your dog, all you need is the rabies vaccines and a de-worming treatment against echinococcus, any dogs can go to Britain but only a few, perfectly trained ones, can be allowed on a moor. Someone might be tempted to

go there and work the dog on grouse in disguise, without asking permissions. I would not do that, it would be dishonest, rude and you could be – rightly so – considered a poacher. Estates need grouse count to assess the quality of game management and decide how to organize the shooting season. Whereas shooting days might be booked in great advance (years!), the final decisions on the numbers of shooting days and on the number of birds that might be shot, will be made at the end of the counts. In 2015, some estates partly cancelled their season and I am not sure about what happened in 2016, I was told that some estates in the Scottish Highlands apparently had less birds than they were supposed to have. Grouse shooting is the result of careful planning and safeguarding the species is the priority. Mismanaging grouse can compromise both the bird and the estate survival. In Scotland and Northern England grouse are very important: they play a big role in local culture and economy. All the people involved in grouse management love this bird and the grouse plays a big role in rural economy. I think I love grouse too, and I know that what I am going to say cannot be considered “romantic” but grouse are money. Moors, as a natural environment, can exist thanks to grouse and the same can be

said about estates. Look at those barren landscapes covered with heather, you cannot grow any crops there. Think about these wide open spaces located in very rural areas of the country and imagine what could happen if there were no grouse. Grouse shooting brings money to these areas and creates jobs; grouse shooting finances moor management and supports biodiversity, these would not be possible without the money earned through grouse shooting. For more information check the website <http://www.giftofgrouse.com/>

The second article of this series, about British field trials, the Puppy Derby and the Champion Stake can be read [here](#).

Still curious about British trials? Check the section A Month on the Moor or [click here](#).

Slideshow below:

Are you REALLY doing that?

Why not? Do you see any alternatives? I invited the moor to move nearby, but it refused. If I wanted the [moor](#), I had to drag myself into a car and drive northwards, exactly like Mohammed did with the mountain. I had no choices: flying with a dog- and her, well our, baggage- was not convenient, furthermore, once there I would have had to rent a car which was not going to be cheap. People tried all sort of tactics to make me change my mind. *It is going to be a long journey, there will be dangers on the way,* and so and so. It is funny when Italians (with my father leading the troop) start thinking that all serial killers, all terrorists and all natural disasters are located past the Alps!

I was surprisingly relaxed about driving all the way there, and confident that nothing bad was going to happen: my grandmother's name was England (Inglesina) she used to love me, England (the nation) was going to be equally kind. In the worst case scenario, I would have escaped from the awful Italian summer heat.

Yes but, alone? And why alone? The idea of having someone to share the journey with was tempting, but could I find anybody suitable? I did not want to deal with the "pale woman burden" (quoting Rudyard Kipling), aka some wimp complaining about everything. and I was not sure my travel plan would have suited the average person. What if the average person would not have enjoyed the moors, the weather, the [trials](#)? Going trialing in the UK for a month was the equivalent of taking a leap of faith, it was not fair to ask anyone to jump from a cliff into the unknown with me.

The scariest thing was probably the length of the journey, in kilometers (or miles, if you prefer). I knew I was going to have a blind date with British trials, but my whole "academic" career had been like that, having been always sent – and for years, not months! – from a very unknown school to another. When I was eight, as we moved to a different house and I was forced to move to a different school, I did not know anybody there, and I never managed to like it but, in the end, I survived. When high school (junior high) time came, I could choose whether to attend the local one, where everybody else was going, or pick an unknown, more difficult and more prestigious one. The local school had a bad reputation and my demanding parents simply told me that, I should not make my choices following the mainstream, but learn choose what was best for me and stick to it, even if I had to do it alone... The same happened with senior high school (raise the hand who wants to go to a difficult one!), and with the university later: most of my friends were going to engineering, computer

science and economics whilst I, unable to pick my first choice (veterinary medicine), was going to major in British Literature. It might sound easy, but it was not: each time, however, it became a little easier and it strengthen me enough to accept and scholarship and fly to Massachusetts all alone.

A [month](#) alone in England (and Scotland) could not scare me, trials were waiting and no good opportunity is meant to be missed!

[The journey continues here.](#)