

TUESDAY 25th March – first range foray, by This Correspondent

All were up bright and early (well, early anyway) for a 6:45 breakfast and 7:30 departure to the range for some team practice. The Vice-Captain instructed someone from each van to take some toilet roll to the range, which prompted a discussion on what people might use if they ran out of it. Ed Compton suggested people might have to resort to a thorn bush, whereupon Gary enlightened us with the “interesting” fact that some of the big white thorns on the local bushes were bigger than others because they played host to ants’ eggs and eventual insect birth. Ed didn’t like the sound of a thorn that resembled not just a hypodermic needle but one that could inject a baby ant into one’s posterior. Moral of the story: don’t wipe your bottom on a thorn bush.

The morning on the range was spent at 300m (although This Correspondent is sure he heard the range officer say yards!), where the wind numbers were larger and more changeable than one might have imagined, and 900m, where the flags proved themselves lighter than at home. The quick changes persisted, but the absolute values were manageable. If a “div of the day” award had been allowed, it might have gone to Gary for forgetting his shooting jacket.

After 900m, the team tried out the mess hall, which microwaved some simple but tasty snacks. We were watched by the only husky puppy we had seen in Africa. Chris, Matt C and Rick managed one of the tour’s more momentous achievements, by getting to the front of the lunch queue before Martin!

The feast had a mixed effect on people’s shooting in the afternoon. Unfortunately its effect on Jumbo’s driving was deleterious. While we had grown accustomed to both his and Chris’s tendency to stall the vehicle very regularly, James outdid himself by managing to stall in what might be described as a large puddle but might equally be called a swamp. Some suggested that the combined weight of the van’s occupants had been the cause but Chris would probably object to that. This Correspondent assumed it was a planned team building exercise, as the effect was to get all target teams together to push the van out of the mud, with David Dyson at the wheel shouting at everyone for being rubbish.

The afternoon was spent at 300, 600 and 900m with a 2ss+15 capping it off at the longest range. With five or six firers per target, it was an ambitious programme and one that, in such heat, was energy sapping for all the firers and doubly so for the coaches who were on the firing point almost the whole time.

One of those coaches was at once grateful and amused when, after deciding to try and fit, and establish a zero with, his newly acquired RightSight, he found several team members coming to his aid to lend tools, expertise and a hand. It was a heartwarming moment, making one really feel part of a team... and the reason it was amusing was that all these shooters, who were under captain’s instructions not to fiddle with or fettle their rifles, were clearly relishing the prospect of playing with someone’s toy – especially one that didn’t *really* matter. Sadly the smugness that

two of them were expecting to experience on a successful sighting shot at 900m was not to be: after the RightSight was fitted, it was discovered that a major split in the stock had been incurred in transit, so that rifle was not going to be used for a while.

Shooting eventually finished around 6pm and the team retired, exhausted and a little bit more acclimatised, to the guest house to prepare to mark Toby Raincock's birthday. We were all impressed with the early birthday present that Mel had put together for him, so there was much to live up to...

We did our best, but everyone was tired so it was another early night in the end. The second half of Toby's birthday would be postponed until Saturday, but not before a classic exchange between Ed Compton and Rick Shouler after the mention of spinach led to a quick discussion of Popeye: "I think Dave Dyson's just like Bluto" ... to which the riposte was "do you mean the dog or the planet?"