

FRIDAY 28<sup>th</sup> March – so who turns my sights now (by That Correspondent)?

We were greeted at breakfast by an ever smiling and courteous Marlie this morning at a so far record early time of 6.15. Many of the Beef Baron knights from the previous evening felt it a little hard to push in much food as their guts were still busy digesting. Nonetheless we were all soon off to the range in slightly more prompt fashion than previously.

Today the Free State Championships continued with 3, 6, 8 and 900m individual shoots. Given almost all of the shooting the firers had done so far had been coached, the prospect of getting to twiddle one's own knobs was exciting, if a little daunting. 300m was a reasonable range and a mild introduction to the fast switching mirage so only a spattering of adventures to the inner were made by the team. As we moved back to 600m it became clear that these subtle changes in mirage would soon be reflected in very unsubtle changes in scores (namely inners and magpies).

Lunch saw the team making good use of the large open sided shelters on camp to get away from the sun, enjoy the breeze and take in light lunches and the contents of Toby's iPod. This was a good choice as the captain had been caught the previous day throwing some shapes to the beat in a brief moment of rejuvenation. After a team meeting to touch base we headed out to the range to do battle once more with the range and, to an extent, ourselves.

After a hard 800m Jon Underwood was clean still (possibly the only one on the range) though many had suffered hard as the wind made large, yet subtle and quite rapid changes. Moving on to 900m it was kind of Nigel to remind us that he was so far the only Brit to have won the Free State Championships (a competition used as a warm-up by visitors but as major an event as any club open to the South Africans). 900m was no easy task and Jon sadly had bad luck with the wind changing in the brief few seconds between his last look at it and his shot being released, leaving him 5 down on the range and the day. Parag made better work of the conditions with a 54.3 (out of 55, since the South Africans favour scores out of 105).

As the shoots were held in two details there was a good amount of time behind the point to relax and reflect and to meet the locals. A certain team member cheekily said to a lady on the range, "You have a beautiful pair of puppies". He was only saved a good slap by the lady in question happening to be carrying two young dogs.

After shooting, the team had a quick rifle cleaning session (to remove the caked copper and filth in their barrels left by the rather dirty PMP ammo they had been using) and David asked Parag "are we straight yet?" We were at a loss as to what was meant because we'd never thought otherwise. Then we headed off to a nearby hill ("the rocks") for a photo. This was in order to repeat a photo taken there of the 1999 GB Palma team. No doubt this team's website will show the photo after

a little tinkering to hide blemishes, add a sepia effect and to reduce the glare off DCD's head. As evening drew in on the ranges, the team gathered for a drink in the bar and prize giving for the Free State Championships.

It turned out that Ed Compton had come 2<sup>nd</sup> in the long range match, Jon Underwood, Paul Sykes and Rick Shouler were 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> in the short range, and Rick Shouler and Jon Underwood had come 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> overall. Rick rightly received a standing ovation for an excellent day's shooting in tricky wind conditions.

Nigel managed the extraordinary achievement of beating Martin to the front of the dinner queue, cheered on by all the team. First up for second helpings, though, was a female UK Under 19 shot who shall remain nameless. When she was also first up for pudding it was suggested to her that she must get an awful lot of exercise to retain her figure, and she replied by gesturing with one of her fingers and saying "yeah, this finger gets loads of exercise". Laughter ensued and she clarified that it was her trigger finger to which she referred.

The evening concluded with an auction of various drink related items in aid of future Free State senior and Under 19 teams to Bisley (wouldn't it be great to see them there for a world inter-state/province/county championship in 2010?): wine, metal beakers with the "Big 5" game on them and sets of similarly engraved glasses in wooden boxes. People were encouraged to buy them so they could pretend at home that they had won them and, after a slow start, the GB and UK Under 19 teams came up trumps in bidding against each other to a sufficient extent that local David Dodds felt obliged to bid in order that "the Poms don't walk off with everything".