

Dateline: South Dakota

A Taste of “Real” Hunting

- **Timetable:** Third Saturday in October through first weekend of January
- **Accommodations:** Various; comfortable but not luxurious
- **Food:** Some box lunches in the field; others – on your own
- **Hunt:** Moderate to difficult

The reason the above snapshots lack definitive details about the accommodations and the food – with words like *various* and *some* – is **this is the first operation I’ve seen that offers so much variety and so many options.** The main reason for this is the hunting spots are spread out over two states in the Great Plains.

With access to 150,000 acres at three locations in North Dakota and seven in South Dakota, **Dennis Foster of Dakota Pheasant Guide** can get hunters into just about any **wild bird hunting** situation they desire.

Foster has developed what just might be a unique relationship with **land-owners who help the pheasant populations out by creating environments where wildlife thrives.** In addition to the obvious cornfields, the lands also offer diverse habitat options like grasslands, CRP, shelterbelts, sloughs, creek bottoms and other food plots.

For example, on a hunt I joined in early December 2014, we hit a variety of properties in a variety of sizes. We started off taking about a five-minute march across what can only be described as the tall grassed, fenced in side yard of one farm. About eight of us clambered

over the barbed-wired outer edge of the enclosure; the others awaited beyond the far fence, in what would have been the shadows of the old oak tree that once held a tire swing for the farmer’s chil-



dren. Except that the leaves had long departed this neck of the woods by early December.

We then drove for perhaps 40 minutes to a spot with tall CRP grass. The younger people in the group had no difficulty negotiating this field, approximately a half mile long and over a quarter mile wide. The combination of the snow that was more than ankle deep, the grass that was nearly waist high and the insurmountable challenge posed by my weight and physical conditioning caused me to bail out about 1/3 of the way through the field. Other hunting spots included smaller runs through standing corn, some food plots and one spot that ran literally along a U.S. highway, about 60 to 100 yards in. Hunters walked through a tree line that bordered a cornfield. Blockers stood at the end of a swale that horseshoed the trees, their backs to the parking area for a heavy

equipment at a grain elevator.

In another spot we drove through a field from which the corn had mostly been harvested and tried to snag any birds that tried to squirt out between the remaining corn and some small hills that ran alongside it.

For the final hunt, walkers headed into a swale-like area bordered by a north-south running tree line and with a swath about 40 yards wide of food and cover bordered on the other side by a cleared field. They walked toward the south end, which was bordered by a county road. Birds flew. And they flew! In front of the walkers. To either side of them. Some held until the walkers neared the end of the strip. In fact, so many of the birds flew out to the east over the cleared field and toward some low, rolling hills, that about four of the blockers looped around to the far side and intercepted a few on their flights.

All these different hunts and hunting situations during a single day should serve to illustrate several points about a hunt with Dakota Pheasant Guide.

First and obviously, Foster doesn’t slow down, so one must be ready to move quickly, both on the hunts and between the hunts. In fact, that is probably the single reason I’ve rated this as a potentially difficult hunt. **If one is in good enough shape to push swiftly through a hunting segment, there’s nothing about the cover or the lay of the land that would make this difficult hunt.**

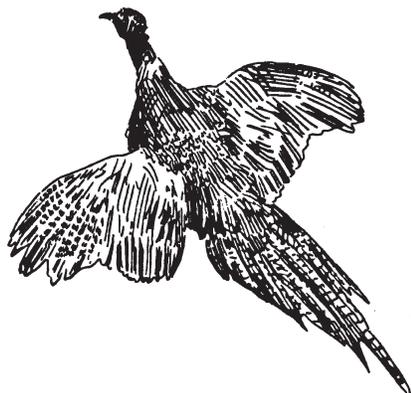
Second, these are not the kinds of hunts one might encounter at a commercial lodge with all the trappings. No huge fields to traverse. No two hunts a day and you’re finished. The group might

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have to hunt and peck its way over five or six spots in a single day, but hunters should surely get their money's worth of ground covered and in birds seen and shooting opportunities.

Third – and also unlike a hunt at a commercial destination – this type of hunting is reminiscent of “real” hunting, the way one might spend a Saturday with some pals in Oklahoma for quail or Minnesota for grouse: hit a spot and move on. The more spots you hit that likely hold birds, the better your chances of getting birds. Hunt and move. Hunt and move. **Granted, this type of hunt might not be for everybody, especially those among us who prefer to “hunt, lunch and nap” instead of to “hunt and move.”** Having said that, though, the experience does feel more realistic – like a day out with your pals – than do the common packaged deals we so often find at hunting lodges. Not necessarily better but different.

With that third notion in mind, realize that a main feature of Foster's operation is the variety of hunting groups he can accommodate: single hunter, small group, family or other large group, even corporate or business outings. Another option Foster offers: Do-it-yourself hunts. Foster says he can accommodate bird hunters who want to do everything themselves because of the “abundance of prime land in both South Dakota and North Dakota” he has access to. In other words, a self-guided hunt with some friends can give one the greatest insight into what a “real” South Dakota pheasant hunt can be like. On top of that, **Foster's service might serve the out-of-state hunter as a worthwhile compromise between just hitting publically accessible spots willy-nilly and booking a trip at a full service lodge.** With all the available options, it's difficult to include the variety of prices in one article. The best thing for an



interested hunter to do is to consult the website him or herself.

I had hunted with a group out of Aberdeen, South Dakota, so I could only get an idea of what the accommodations were like at one of the spots in that area, the Redfield apartment. This is located on the second floor of a huge equipment pole barn and shop. The apartment is very clean and modern, and it features a full kitchen. It can sleep eight. Additionally, the barn itself has a convenient and roomy space for cleaning birds, complete with running water.

The website also has descriptions and photos of all the available accommodations, so it's best to check there for those, too.

The Redfield property, where we ended our day to clean birds, is about 45 miles south of Aberdeen.

Hunters who want to “float” rather than to make a base camp at a specific hunting location's accommodations will find loads of places in Aberdeen.

Depending on the location of one's selected hunting property, Dakota Pheasant Guides is convenient to the following regional airports in the following cities: Aberdeen, Pierre, Sioux Falls.

Finally, on the “preparation” part of Foster's website, he offers these words of wisdom. “Twelve-gauge guns are strongly recommended as our birds are 100 percent wild. Meaning they are wily, fast and tough – particularly later in the season. The lighter gauges can and do work, provided you have experience handling them. Beginners are best to start out bigger.”

To that I will only add, “Beginners and bad shots. Based on experience.”

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For lodging info in Aberdeen: www.visitaberdeensd.com or huntfishsd.com – see “Hotels” link under FAQs.

–Thomas Carney



For Bird Shooters & Waterfowlers

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