

Rathmoy, a lasting memory!!

You are woken by the crows of the cock pheasants. Looking beyond the birds the Rangitikei flows by and your blood starts to course through your body as the excitement of the day ahead takes hold.

The lodge at Rathmoy is extremely comfortable and located in an idyllic position. The eight guns in our party were all accommodated comfortably and the cooked breakfast went down a treat.

Part of shooting driven pheasant is about getting dressed to look the part and the team did not let Rathmoy down. A vast array of 'thousand' acre jackets, ties, assorted hats, breeks, trousers and boots were turned out for the day.

Fed and watered with a magnificent breakfast it was time for the pre shoot briefing. By this time everyone was getting a bit 'feverish' and keen to hear what was planned for the day. Mark Grace, who has developed the game preserve, sorted out the peg allocation for the day and then launched into the brief...a bit of background on Rathmoy, a bit of shooting etiquette, plan for the day, safety, introduced the gamekeeper and blew the horn (used to signal the start & end of each drive).

By this time the teams' trigger fingers were getting twitchy!! Loaded up with plenty of shells it was onto the purpose built trailer towed by the John Deere and off to the first of 5 drives for the day.

The countryside around the Rangitikei is absolutely fantastic and the terraces that sit above the river make for both excellent cropping paddocks and areas from which to drive pheasants. Off to the bull paddock we went and waited by our pegs for the sound of the horn.....a couple of early birds fly by...blow the horn we are all thinking to ourselves. Finally we get the call and it is guns loaded waiting for the pheasants. The birds at Rathmoy are beautifully presented to the shooters and with a lot of variety. We manage a tally of 29 on the drive and everyone is all smiles as they recall the ones they hit and those that got through to live another day!!

One of the unique aspects of Rathmoy is the jet boating to drives on the river....another is 'Rough Red', Mark's trusted jetboat!! Lifejackets on and it was off down river to the second drive. Standing at our pegs on one side of the river the birds were driven off a terrace on the other side and were very high and very fast...needless to say the tally was not as good there were a lot of stories as to the cause!!

Morning tea at Rathmoy is appreciated by all, beaters, pickers and the guns partake in warm soup and sausage roles prepared by Andy the Chef. More stories are told about the mornings hits and misses with the beaters chipping in with the 'honesty' factor.

The third drive was a snap shoot known as Whaka Gourge. Buried in a tight native bush gully the birds were presented over head with limited time to get a lead on them. Most were hit directly overhead as the guns swung through the birds at speed. Great shooting and guaranteed to leave you with a cricked neck!!

By this time the team was looking forward to lunch and a break. Returning to the Lodge, Andy had the barbeque fired up, fresh bread and salads, and there was a cold beer or glass of red to parch the thirst. Lunch at Rathmoy is a great opportunity to meet the beaters and pickers, talk about the morning, dogs and the ones that got away.

Lunch was followed by two more drives. The first, known as the Lombardies, birds sweep over your head at varying heights. Behind the pegs is a hedge row of very tall poplars and as the birds break cover they have to gain height to clear them so they are beating their wings hard as they climb to then swoop into the paddock beyond. All the guns are visible to each other so good shots are met with yells of encouragement. Of course the lucky birds get to fly along the entire line and escape all the lead which is met with shaking heads and dismay. By this time our tally was 155 and our target of 200 was looking pretty tough.

After a leisurely walk across the paddocks, it was back on the trailer and off to the final drive for the day, the Zig Zag. Sounds harmless, however they come from a long way off and are high and fast. Unless of course you are unlucky enough to draw peg 10, and by the time you get up there you are almost in the clouds, and the birds are flying past you at speed!!

Still short of our 200 we ended the day with a drive down on the river bank. A couple guns walked behind the beaters and had a great shoot getting those trying to retreat back behind the beating line. The rest of the guns were placed in a crop beyond the bush with a roosting spot to the rear. The birds were lower compared to the rest of the day, and waiting for blue sky beyond them made the shooting difficult as they only presented themselves as targets when they were at the gun line. Anyway we managed a total of 197 pheasants, a [pukeko], a couple of ducks and a magpie!! The shot ratio was a respectable 5.9 shots per bird.

A fantastic day was had by all. Fresh air, great company, great shooting and great New Zealand scenery.

Returning to the lodge for a well deserved 'sharpen' the tally for the day was presented in a frame of totara logs down by the river with magnificent burning fires at each corner. Mark gave a quick debrief on the day...tally, good shots, notable shots etc...our lead gun thanked the beaters and pickers and we basked in the memories of the day.

For those with any energy left, there was the opportunity to try your hand at a bit of fishing in the river where the trout are plentiful, before the light fades completely.

For the guns it was back to Lodge to tidy up for dinner with Mark and his parents Christopher and Suzanna Grace. Dinner was served on the covered deck in front of a large open fire overlooking the beautiful Rangitikei river.

Having been on pheasant shoots in other parts of the world, in particular the UK, what is on offer at Rathmoy is world class. On top of that you experience the NZ approach to driven shooting which embodies the NZ outdoors at their best, coupled with both a relaxed approach to managing the guns and great hospitality.

For those of you who enjoy a day in the country with a shotgun at hand, amongst friends and like minded Kiwis, Rathmoy comes highly recommended as one of those unique experiences you should enjoy whilst you can.



# RATHMOYNAN

THE RIVER REGION EXPERIENCE

