


*At Greystone Castle you'll find bird
and big game hunting fit for a king. And you might
even meet the "princess." by Gayne C. Young*



Castles are shrouded in mystery, in stories that grow greater yet further from the truth with each telling. Legends and secrets dwell within their heavy stone walls, as do the ghosts of the laborers whose backs they're built upon. Castles project intimidation and a sense of wonderment and awe from those who stand before them or venture behind their fortress walls. Castles in Texas are no exception.

Located sixty miles west of Ft. Worth, Greystone Castle Sporting Club sits on a high bluff overlooking the ghost town of Thurber, its granite walls blocking the manicured courtyard from the gusty West Texas winds, its spiraling turrets providing a spectacular view of the plains all the way to the horizon. The land below is roughly 5,000 acres of oak woodlands, sprinkled with bass-laden ponds, cattail marshes, and strips of sorghum, cane and corn planted for wildlife. Big whitetails, numerous exotics, pheasants, doves, quail, chukar and Hungarian partridge, waterfowl and wild turkeys – altogether

offer hunters a wealth of possibilities on gamefields designed for royalty. Or were they?

The truth is, nobody knows.

Or rather, nobody knows for sure.

Rumors and wild stories tell of the original owner as a man fascinated with European castles and ancient history. He apparently had a deep affection for Old World architecture, especially 16th century English castles. But his dream of building his own castle was a costly one and in the middle of construction he decided to sell the property. The current owners actually considered demolishing the castle and starting a new lodge from scratch, but then reconsidered. After all, how many people can say they own a castle? In Texas no less?

I first visited Greystone for a product rollout from Texas Hunt Company.

"I had never hunted at Greystone before," said Jeff Wemmer, the president of Texas Hunt Company. "But it had an excellent reputation as one of the top bird-hunting destinations in the country. I have to say, though, the place surpassed my every expectation. And more. It was just first class all the way – a great place to host a bunch of

A Royal Time in **TEXAS**

outdoor writers.”

After learning all about the impressive design features found on the company's backpacks and bird vests, I joined the others for an afternoon of hunting pheasants and Hungarian partridge. Despite letting a bunch of birds fly away completely unscathed (if there's a worse place to be a poor shot than in front of a group of fellow outdoor writers, I've yet to find it), I had a fantastic time. Seeing my excitement and learning that it was my first time hunting for upland birds, *Sporting Classics* Editor Chuck Wechsler asked me to join him the following year when he would return to Greystone for a mixed bag of whitetail deer, blackbuck antelope and birds.



General Manager Doug Cannon and a hunter follow a pair of Labs in search of pheasants and quail. Greystone Castle's 5,000 acres is a mix of woods, marshes and prairie lowlands that have been planted to a variety of crops that provide food and cover for the birds.



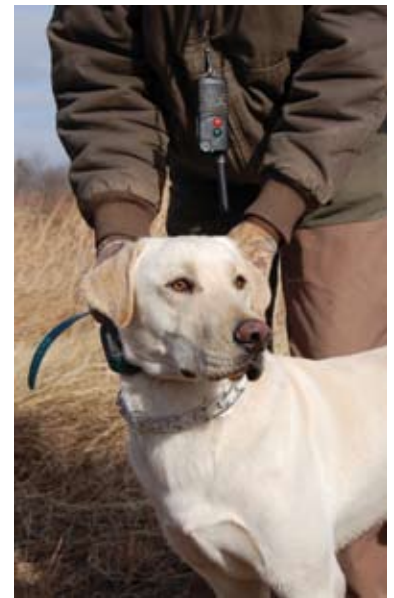
“You mean I can take a big Texas whitetail on *Sporting Classic’s* tab?” I foolishly asked.

“No, but you can write an article about my hunt,” Chuck offered.

Once a serf, always a serf.

“And we’ll shoot some birds together,” Chuck added.

Things suddenly got better. Now I was a serf that got to go bird-hunting.



A year later, on a breezy January morning, I was met at the front gate by General Manager Doug Cannon, his wife, Kim, and Isabel, an effervescent little English cocker who was obviously the castle’s princess. Doug informed me that Chuck was out hunting whitetails and that I would join him for lunch. Until then, I could explore the castle or settle into my room. I chose the latter and immediately wanted to move in permanently.

My room was actually part of an entire wing of the castle, one of five separate lodges located within its walls. Chuck and I would share a suite that consisted of five bedrooms, four bathrooms, a fully stocked kitchen and bar, and a combination sitting room-living room. True to the castle’s Old World theme, the suite was decorated with dark wood, oversized leather chairs and high ceilings. The bookshelves were lined with the classics of hunting literature, wildlife art and taxidermy mounts of birds taken on the ranch.

After meeting up with Chuck for a chef-prepared “light lunch” of buffalo burgers, French fries, salad and orange-swirl cheesecake, it was time for an

afternoon bird-hunt and a drive through what really makes Greystone unique.

Having grown up hunting in Texas, I’ve been to a lot of game ranches. Some were well-managed and offered a good hunting experience but others were the type that give high-fenced hunting a bad name. These are the ranches that are too small to allow any type of sport, are overcrowded with game to the point of resembling a drive-thru park, and offer nothing more than the opportunity to shoot a semi-tame animal. Putting Greystone in this category is like comparing a castle to a trailer home.

During my three-day stay at Greystone, I went afield five times after big game with Chuck and while we saw a goodly number of whitetails and blackbuck, the hunting was always a challenge. Even sitting in the ranch’s best deer blind we only spotted a few whitetail



John Fredericks prepares to tote a load of mallards after a few hours of shooting from one of Greystone's spacious blinds. Opposite: Sporting Classics Publisher Chuck Wechsler targets a fast-flying bobwhite. This is not just put-and-take gunning; many pheasants have been roaming the property for months.



does, an old aoudad and some errant turkeys. This is a far cry from the ranches that guarantee a hundred percent success rate on any animal under the sun.

The key to Greystone's realistic hunting experience lies in how the property is managed. As Doug Cannon explained, "Our goal is to mirror the hunting environment of the animals' native habitats."

Greystone's goal of closely replicating wild bird hunting explains why it was selected as an Orvis endorsed Wingshooting Lodge. On my afternoon hunt with Chuck and guide John Fredericks, we walked expansive fields of klein grass and native prairie plants interlaced with strips of sorghum and corn.

"All this really reminds me of my growing-up days in South Dakota," Chuck said as we followed a pair of big-running pointers. "The sixties were the Soil Bank years, and there was a tremendous amount of great habitat for the birds. They were everywhere . . . and in huge numbers."

And just like those halcyon years in South Dakota, we flushed pheasants and quail almost everywhere we walked on that windy afternoon at Greystone. Pushing downfield, with the dogs crisscrossing in figure eights before us, we gunned covey after covey of bobwhites along with pairs of chukar partridge and solitary roosters that exploded from the amber prairie grasses.

Watching my shot hit just behind a colorful plume of rust and black tail-feathers sure seemed like "real hunting" to me.

I turned to see Chuck popping the spent shells from his castle-borrowed Beretta over-and-under.

"Can't believe I missed," I concededly groaned.

The type of smile a young man yearns to get from an admired elder swept over Chuck face.

"It's only your second hunt," he said. "You're really improving."

Fortunately, my wingshooting skills continued to improve during our duck hunt the following morning. A blue northern nipped at my nose and ears as I stood in a wooden blind at the edge of a prairie marsh. Behind me John worked the calls, reeling a cacophony of enticement broken by the deep-voiced warnings of "coming in on your left," "right overhead gentlemen" and "slowly, to your right."

Thundering shots and a steady rain of spent shells hit the planked floor as John shouted commands to his two Labs, which in a short space

of time retrieved more than a dozen mallards.

Throughout the action I found myself following Chuck's earlier advice to enjoy the hunt simply for what makes it so special – watching the mallards zipping, zagging and rocketing overhead and the dogs leaping two and three times their body lengths, then plowing through the cold water with intense determination to retrieve the downed birds.

These elements, combined with the thrill of the hunt and the camaraderie, all in the shadow of a castle, made for a day I won't soon forget.

That evening, with our thoughts on deer and blackbuck, Doug drove us to a section of the ranch where wooded hills and plunging ravines meet the West Texas plains. On the way Doug pointed out a dark, mature blackbuck cutting through a tall stand of bluestem grasses. We continued driving to a higher vantage from where Doug and Chuck

could make a stalk.

Glassing from a patch of scrub oak, we soon spotted the charred black saddle of the antelope as it meandered through the straw-like grass toward a motte of trees. Adhering to the adage of “three’s a crowd” – especially on a stalk (or was it leave the serf behind?) – I watched as Chuck and Doug sally forth, slowly but steadily.

For a long half-hour the two men snaked, stooped and crawled after the skittish antelope, only to watch him dart off into the thick cover. It was a process that would be repeated ten more times – all to no avail – in their dogged pursuit of a trophy blackbuck.

After their failed stalk, we loaded back into the truck and headed toward another meadow planted in wheat that was attracting both deer and antelope. During the short ride I couldn’t help but think about how in my two and a half days on the ranch I hadn’t seen a high fence since driving through the front gate. Not only that, but after two wingshoots, a duck hunt and an afternoon of deer hunting not only had I not seen any area twice, but I hadn’t see the entire ranch.

“I think that’s our boy,” Doug announced, nodding toward an opening just beyond a small island of oak and scrub brush.

Chuck and Doug quickly exited the truck and headed into the thick cover to cut off the antelope. Again I watched the men as they carefully moved into the wind and out of sight. Twenty-five minutes passed before I heard a rifle shot. A second immediately followed. I stood next to the truck, the sun setting behind me, waiting to find out what had transpired.

Before long Doug returned and drove me to a clearing where Chuck stood over a big eight-point whitetail.

“What happened to your blackbuck?” I asked, admiring the deer.

“He got away,” Chuck grinned. “But then we saw this guy.”

Chuck’s luck in losing a blackbuck but gaining a beautiful Texas whitetail was only one of many stories told around the dining table that night. And once again dinner was an event – consisting of French wine, lobster tempura, pork loins, seasoned rice and chocolate cake sweet enough to drop a hummingbird. It was the perfect ending to another day spent hunting and living like royalty.



The next morning we were back after blackbuck, though again, on yet another part of the ranch. Our guide Nate Goudy took us to a blind overlooking a low, oak-circled hollow where he’d seen several mature antelope. Even the blinds at Greystone Castle are fit for a king as Nate, Chuck and I sat comfortably inside the elevated stand. In the clearing before us, ghostly shadows flitted back and forth in the half-light as two blackbuck males vied for the attention of several females. In the faint light before sunrise Nate was able to identify one buck as an excellent trophy, with heavy horns that spiraled high above his head.

“Watch the one to the right of that crooked oak,” Nate whispered. “If he doesn’t leave before legal shooting light, he’s the one you want.”

The darkness slowly gave way to light as we all sat in baited silence, waiting to see what the phantom would do.

“Can you see him yet?” Nate barely asked.

Chuck nodded slightly, his eye trained behind his riflescope.

“Take him when . . .”

Before Nate could finish Chuck had fired and the buck was down.

He was everything Chuck had wanted in a blackbuck – a mature animal with spiraling horns and a coat as black as pitch. It was another fine trophy taken on lands worthy of a king.



Wechsler (left) and Nate Goudy with a trophy blackbuck. Below: Doug Cannon and wife, Kim, with Isabel, the castle's "princess." Opposite: Cannon and Goudy head out to the gamefields. At upper right is the Wobble Deck where hunters can hone their shooting skills.



During my short visit at the Greystone, I had not only been treated like royalty, but I had experienced some fantastic hunting, partook of some exquisite food and wine, and gotten a lot of sage advice from Chuck on everything from bird hunting to writing. Perhaps the best thing I brought away from Greystone – other than some choice venison and blackbuck chops – was the decision of where I'll be spending the paycheck I'll receive for this article. 🐾

Our morning hunt had not taken long, leaving us with a few last hours for quail and pheasants. Chuck and I met Doug and John at the bird-hunting truck, which was loaded with a couple of setters and pointers (four of Greystone's over forty exceptionally trained gundogs). Chuck, who had hunted with English cockers at a preserve back East, asked if little Isabel could come along.

"Sure," Doug beamed. "We'll see what she can do."

Looking into the Isabel's deep-brown eyes, Chuck couldn't bear to see her put in a cage for the short ride to the hunt area. He insisted she ride in his lap in the front of the truck. Doug said that would be fine, and watching the dog twirl around on the front seat and happily stick her head out the window, I got the feeling she'd ridden there many times before.

Isabel's unofficial premier outing was exceptional. Not only did she find and flush three roosters, she even managed to run down and retrieve a winged bird. Chuck and I couldn't help but laugh watching her proudly carry a bird with wings so large they covered her face like a mask. Doug's face showed the strong sense of pride he felt in his little cocker. What a joyous ending to our hunt at Greystone.

IF YOU WANT TO GO

Upland gamebird and waterfowl hunts are available on half-day and full-day packages that include lodging, meals and beverages, guide, and transportation to and from the field. Special hunt packages are also provided for whitetails and a variety of exotics

including blackbuck, red stag, aoudad and gemsbok.

For more information or to book a hunt, call 800-399-3006 or visit www.greystonecastle.com.

FIELD TESTS

Over the years I've hunted with a number of precision-shooting rifles but none looked as good as they performed – until my visit to Greystone where I proudly carried a Tigercat from Serengeti Rifles. Actually, the rifle was a loaner from my good friend Ron Stepp, who had the .338 Federal custom-built by the talented craftsmen at Serengeti. Small and light, with slender stock fashioned from Turkish walnut, this beautiful little rifle accounted for a big whitetail and a blackbuck, each with one shot. Check out Serengeti's line of rifles, which our own Ron Spomer has called "the perfect blend of beauty and performance." Visit www.serengeti.com or call 406-756-2399. – *Chuck Wechsler, editor*