

VOYAGE

Test your Mettle in Metal

Traversing continents on a journey to test the immeasurably high standards of Longthorne Guns, Elaine Stewart of the Lancashire based gun makers, conquers parched climates and passport control as she puts her guns to the test on an extraordinary South American adventure

At Longthorne we take great pride in the quality of our guns and go to great lengths to ensure that they are fit for today's ammunition and conditions.

I thought you may like to hear about our recent trip to Argentina dove shooting were we, being, myself and my gunmaker husband James Longthorne Stewart gave one of our 12 bore guns a very serious workout in extremely hot conditions over four days.

Although at least one of our clients regularly feeds reports back to us about how well his gun, a Longthorne Hesketh 12 bore performs on his many trips to Argentina, we wanted to see for ourselves, Argentina is a place famous for the sheer volume of available birds, millions I suspect.

I had booked the trip several months ago in anticipation of the said gun being completed, taking guns overseas can sometimes be problematic, particularly Argentina as it is an embargoed country and it is advisable to secure a UK export licence otherwise it can be refused by the Airline, in our case British Airways because they fly direct from Heathrow to Buenos Aires, a much simpler operation when carrying a shotgun than having to get connection flights. They don't always ask to see it but better to err on the side of caution. To do this I had to allocate the gun number prior to it being finished, and also give the details to the 'Argentinian Outfitter' to enable them to generate the import paperwork (RENAR certificate), which is also required for the Export Licence.

Due to our heavy workload it had been touch and go as to whether the gun would actually be finished on time, it was important that we had a 'current specification' gun to use rather than one of our older in house demo guns. Several late nights the week before ensured that it was ready for proofing in London on

the Friday prior to the flight (Incidentally Friday 13th December – perhaps not the best omen), I was relieved when, as usual, our latest 12 bore Longthorne Hesketh Deluxe passed for magnum steel with ¾" chokes without any problems.

The day of the flight we arrived at Heathrow in plenty of time (4 hours prior to departure is advisable) to allow adequate time to process the paperwork. Some airlines, including BA require advanced notification if travelling with guns, in our case 72 hours and don't assume that just because you book the weapon on the outgoing flight it will automatically be booked on the return flight as it won't be unless you advise them of this.

We arrived in Buenos Aires on 16th December and after some confusion as to where we actually had to collect the gun from, it eventually appeared on the luggage carousel, we made our way to the RENAR office where the paperwork was checked against the gun number and we had to pay the import fee of around £50.

I had engaged the services of a 'Transfer Agent', which proved to be invaluable, especially on a first trip, she (Angie) met and introduced herself at the RENAR office and then met us in the main terminal after the paperwork had been processed and drove us to our first hotel, The Alvear Palace in Buenos Aires. What a magnificent establishment I was going to enjoy this, we were to spend four days there prior to flying to Cordoba for the dove shooting.

I must say I loved this hotel, the staff were amazing, especially in the bar where we spent most evenings! It was a pleasure to watch the bar staff who were so professional, respectful and considerate especially towards their regular clientele, many of who were of more senior years. A general word of caution though, some credit cards can be a 'problem' - I'm not sure

why. Although we reached the conclusion that it is a 'technology thing' and perhaps some technology needs some updating, not many places use chip and pin for example including this hotel. My first chosen credit card declined despite the reassurances by my bank (on the telephone) that there wasn't a problem and there was no reason for it declining, fortunately I had several others and one of them worked, but I did feel a little like a credit card thief passing the various cards to the receptionist saying 'try this one then'. I now understand that this isn't an uncommon occurrence.

Friday arrived and our Transfer Agent, Angie and her Boss, Ariel promptly collected us. This proved to be invaluable as when we arrived at the domestic airport there were unprecedented queues of people and much confusion prevailed. The reason being, the fact that on the previous day there had been strikes and many flights cancelled so people were trying to get on new flights and there was a backlog. Fortunately our flight had been delayed by one hour, which gave us a little more time, but had Ariel not been there to assist and sort out the gun paperwork in amongst the general chaos I am sure we would have missed the flight. This fellow was absolutely great, spoke perfect English and had a brilliant sense of humour; he needed to have on this particular morning!

On arrival at Cordoba, we retrieved the gun from the luggage carousel and were met by a couple of Team from Los Chaneros who drove us to the Lodge about 1.5 hours away in the foothills of The Andies. We were greeted by our host, Zac, a lovely young American fellow, who explained the ropes and after a gorgeous three-course lunch, and a small siesta, it was time to go shooting.

The great thing about this lodge is the very close proximity of the shooting fields, only about 10 minutes away, at some Lodges they



are hours away which means you can spend quite a bit of time travelling backwards and forwards. Ten minutes is great as if you do want to return to the lodge for anything - it's not a problem.

James was introduced to his 'bird boy' Pedro, who ensured that his pockets were continually refilled with cartridges, the bird boys will load if required, however, James preferred to load his own. The lodge Manager had organised for James to be strategically placed to take advantage of the higher birds. Much to the surprise of everyone our gun performed flawlessly in 35 degree heat without any problems at all over the four days, its light weight and agility seemed to make it ideal for the conditions and several of the other guests were intrigued by its unique construction, particularly our barrels which are constructed from a single piece of steel with no soldered joints. Although the gun became hot, the heat dispersal was rapid due to the fact that we don't have a soldered central rib trapping any hot air. We were later told that it is not uncommon for clients guns to fail as they are not suited to the heat and sheer volume of birds, should this happen it is possible to rent a gun from the lodge. Although it is possible to shoot thousands of birds per day and guests at the Lodge often do, James had decided to only aim for the high and challenging birds and limit his number to around 700 per day,

which compared to most is a small number indeed.

The days are split into a morning and afternoon shoot with three-course lunch in the middle, and a three-course dinner at the end always huge and delicious, especially the steaks, and drinks on tap. Besides being a great place for a group of guys to go shooting, the Lodge is a great retreat for wives and families who can either shoot or chill out by the pool, relax or have a massage, which is basically what I did most of the time due to a back injury preventing me from shooting, and I met a couple of lovely ladies there and thoroughly enjoyed it.

On day four, James only shot in the morning as our flight back to Buenos Aires was in the afternoon, so after he had finished he helped Pedro collect the doves and after being shown how to remove the breasts without the aid of a knife prepared them with Pedro so that he could take them home for his family, we ate dove several times over the four days and it is delicious. Although the doves are considered a pest none of them go to waste, if they are not used for food, they are consumed by the abundant native wildlife, we often saw huge eagles circling above waiting until the shooting had stopped so that they could take advantage of the bounty.

In the afternoon Andreas accompanied us to the airport and made sure everything

went smoothly checking the gun in which it did. Once back at Buenos Aires, Ariel was waiting for us like an old friend to take us back to The Alvear Palace for another six days, after a repeat of the 'credit card/checking-in drama', this time the original card didn't work and another one did! I was resigned to the fact that it would be salads until the end of the week to counteract the huge three-course 'Los Chaneros' meals! I felt that I could completely trust Ariel and so paid him when he dropped us at the hotel, he had organised for a colleague, Pepe, to collect us from the hotel and take us to the international airport the following Sunday for our flight back as he was going to be on holiday.

Pepe arrived punctually on morning of our flight back to the UK, he also spoke perfect English and accompanied us up until we departed through the security gates just in case of problems, we were told that sometimes it helps to know 'unofficial' methods in case 'official' methods fail and Pepe was our man. Fortunately our paperwork was all in order and no problems ensued and we arrived back in the UK complete with gun after a very successful trip.

Longthorne Guns
Tel: +44 (0) 1772 811 215
Email: enquiries@longthorneguns.com
www.longthorneguns.com