

Holland & Holland

Outdoor Pursuits at The Greenbrier

Story and photos
by
John Shtogren

Almost Heaven, West
Virginia

John Denver had it right when he sang, “Almost heaven, West Virginia.” Those lyrics never rang more true than this summer when Holland & Holland, the venerable British gun maker, hosted its ninth annual Outdoor Pursuits Weekend at The Greenbrier. For two days a lucky group of men and women from around the country came as close to heaven as you can get with your feet still on this good earth. They brought with them a passion for the sporting life and pursued it with the best of the Best London Guns, world-class instruction and five-star menus in a drop-jaw beautiful part of the Blue Ridge.

Gun Maker, Dream Maker

Holland & Holland has been handcrafting guns since 1835 and creating dreams for



Top Gun Guy Hubbard on the sporting clays course. He splits his time between his residences at the Greenbrier Sporting Club and in Manhattan..

One of the very best Best London Guns



anyone who loves fine firearms. Not one part of any Holland & Holland gun is interchangeable with another—not a barrel, not a side lock, not a firing pin. Each gun is absolutely one of a kind, a unique marriage of polished steel and burnished walnut, a marriage that may take over a thousand manhours to perform. Some eighty-five percent of the guns made are “bespoke,” ordered by and custom-tailored for a particular individual. The person may wait years for his or her gun, but the wait is worthwhile because the craftsmanship in the final product surpasses excellence and touches perfection.

While many sportsmen dream of a Holland & Holland gun, the dream may not go so far as to own one. Just holding one for a good many would be heavenly. At the Outdoor Pursuits Weekend such dreams came true. The finest models of Holland and Holland shotguns were available to admire, to caress and, yes, to shoot. Daryl Greatrex, Managing Director of Holland and Holland Sporting Weapons, brought some of the best guns with him from London, and Guy Davies, Sales Director, filled out the selection from the New York Gunroom.

Greenbrier falconer Cody Morgan demonstrates an alternative to hunting with a shotgun.



Outdoor Pursuits Events

Over the weekend, guests were offered a variety of shooting venues as well as other opportunities to hone their sporting skills. Not surprisingly, the shooting was the main event for most guests, but fly fishing and off-road driving became attractive alternatives when shooting shoulders began to grow tender.

The Shooting. The guests did their shooting at Greenbrier Gun Club’s sporting

clays and five-stand courses. Almost everyone carried their own guns. However, a Holland & Holland gun was placed at every shooting station so the guest could shoot his or her own gun and then for comparison shoot a Best London Gun at the same targets. The Holland & Holland guns included classic side-by-sides as well as more modern over-and-unders in different calibers from 12-gauge down to .410 bore. There are few times in life that a shooter will be able to shoulder a top of the line Royal 12-gauge side-by-side at one station and follow it with a Royal 410 bore over-and-under at the next. After either Holland and Holland experience, returning to your own gun could be a slow walk.

On the course, separate score cards were kept for how the shooter fared with his or her own gun and the Holland & Holland gun. Shooters could choose to compete for top gun honors in either category or simply shoot for fun. There was, however, no apparent sense of competition anywhere on the course. Shooters could visit any station in any order at any time they chose. The pace was very much like taking

Dr. George Wilson takes aim. He practices in Charleston, West Virginia.



Photo by Robert Pearson, Holland & Holland.

a stroll in the English countryside, which under the circumstances was as it should be.

Individual shooting instruction was available from Ken Davies, Holland & Holland Chief Shooting Instructor. He and his colleagues conduct over 5,000 individual lessons each year at the famed Shooting Ground outside London and elsewhere around the world. Other instructors included Justin Jones and John Higgins from the British School of Shooting located outside Savannah. The two brought over thirty years of professional shooting experience to the Greenbrier as well as just the right amount of delightful low-key British humor. One might say that if one's shooting did not improve under the guidance of these gentlemen that one might possibly reconsider the game of golf.

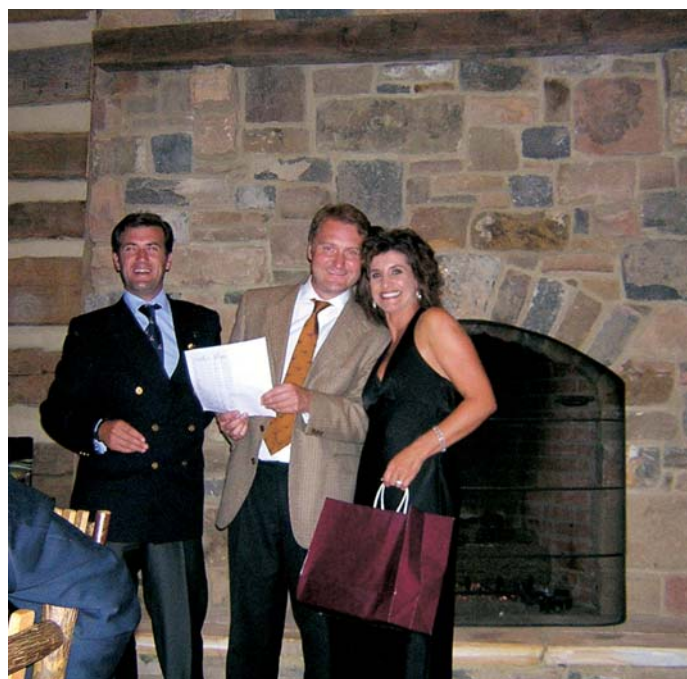
Other Outdoor Pursuits. When it came time to put down their guns, guests were invited to pick up a fly rod. Bill Dawson from Sage, the fly fishing specialists, conducted the Sage Interactive Fishing Instruction and Fishing Derby. Guests were coached in fly casting techniques using the latest and best Sage equipment and then encouraged to apply their skills in one of the property's stocked ponds. Alan Williamson, Director of Outdoor Pursuits at The Greenbrier Sporting Club, presented a fly tying workshop where guests learned to wind feather and fur around a hook shank and then immediately find out if their imitation would fool a fish.

When it came time to lay aside both rod and gun, the guests could get behind the wheel of a Land Rover and learn off-road driving techniques. Some people may think that off-roading amounts to mashing down the gas pedal and away they go in a wash of mud. At The Greenbrier Off-Road Driving School you learn that high performance means going "as slow as possible, as fast as necessary." The Off-Road



A heavenly sunset from the top of Kate's Mountain

**Holland & Holland's
Daryl Greatrex (center)
and Guy Davies (left)
congratulate Tracy Helms,
of Charleston,
West Virginia,
who was Women's Top
Gun.**



Driving School is the second most popular outdoor activity next to golf for regular Greenbrier guests.

After leaving the field, there were indoor pursuits to consider. Fred Dame, Master Sommelier, offered a seminar in Exploring Fine Wines. An equally refined alternative was the traditional four o'clock tea in the

stately lobby of the main resort. Afternoon tea has been served in the main lobby every day since 1931, with the exception of a period during World War II while we were off helping the British.

Passion and Treasured Moments

The Holland & Holland guests came to The

Greenbrier with a passion for the sporting life, a zest and deep appreciation for the best of the best you can find in the field. They found what they were looking for over the weekend, and moreover, they took away priceless memories of special moments that will make them smile in the coming seasons. Here are a few of my own:

Snatches of conversations caught at the Welcome Reception: “Rancho Caracol on Lake Las Alazanas will have fine quail and white wing this season...” “Sailfish off the Galapagos are taking flies quite well... .” “Have you heard anything about driven pheasants in the Czech Republic?”

Brit John Higgins’ deadpan mantra while demonstrating the firepower of an 1835 muzzle-loading 8-bore: “To be sure to kill them dead, ram the powder not the lead.” Avoids triggering unpleasantness.

Tracy Helms from Charleston up the road wearing sling back stilettos while competing for the Holland & Holland Women’s Top Gun. And she won.

My shooting coach’s suggestion after I missed a series of fluorescent green and orange parallel pairs: “Just focus on the green and then shoot what’s left.” I did, and smoked them after that.

An exchange between guests overheard in the Holland & Holland display tent: “A Royal side-by-side or a Ferrari Modena? Come on, ask me a hard one.”

A falcon diving between close standing guests to take the handler’s glove during the cocktail hour in the carpark.

Falling in love with a little round bodied 20-gauge side-by-side. She wasn’t a Royal but she fit me perfectly, and we did magic double after double. She will always be mine, at least in my heart.

The serving chef’s suggestion at the dinner buffet: “Salmis of pheasant, grilled breast of quail in a wild mushroom ragout, roasted venison loin in a blackberry glaze... . Do try them all.”

The sunset from the pavilion at Kate’s Mountain Lodge glowing in unimagined hues of purple and gold that turned my thoughts from guns to God.

Almost heaven, West Virginia—indeed!


For information on the next Holland & Holland event or similar sporting pursuits, contact Sarah Forrester at The Greenbrier Sporting Club at (800) 624-6070.

Visit the Holland & Holland website to learn about a truly superb company and give yourself something to dream about (www.hollandandholland.com). If you want to actively pursue the dream, contact Guy Davies at the New York Gunroom at (212) 752-7755.

Visit the Sage website for truly fine fly fishing gear (www.sageflyfish.com).


Visit the British School of Shooting website to find information about shooting instruction, event management or building your own sporting clays course (www.britishshooting.com).

The author is an outdoorsman, farmer and international management consultant whose travels often take him to the far edges and borderlands.



Hunting Preserve

from wingshooting
along the banks
of the James River,
to high pheasant
shoots over
lowland pegs...



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