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A driver heads out with a pack of hounds as the band cheers on the hunters.



Photo by Michael Breuer

Bavarian Rhapsody

Traditional driven hunts for Russian boar.

STORY BY MAGNUS PELZ



Photo by Magnus Pelz

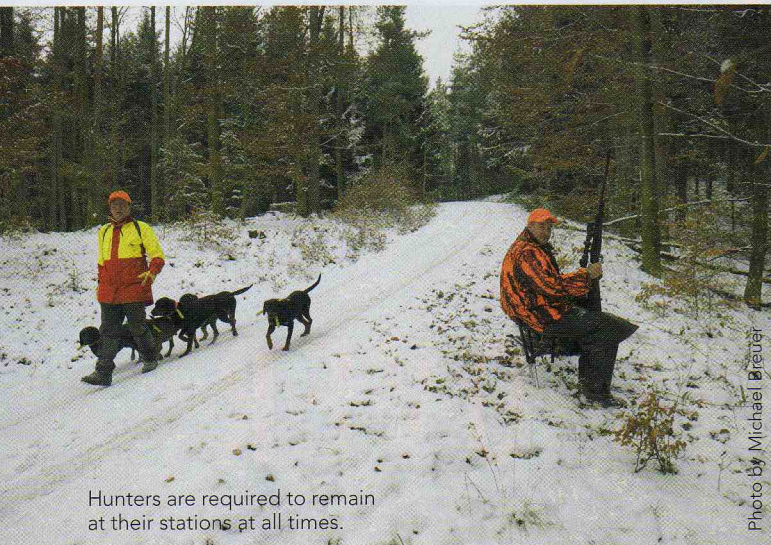
Hunting in Germany is quite different from that known to the American hunter. I bet when you show up in camp there aren't 100 other hunters geared up and an eight-piece brass band cheering you on.

Before going any further, I guess I should explain German hunting tradition. For several centuries, the hunt has been an integral part of our social life in Germany and in Europe as a whole. Because hunting is such a social occasion, it's easy to understand how many of our traditions, rites and customs were formed and have become an integral part of the hunt.

Unlike hunting in Africa or on large ranches in the United States, the human element in Central Europe has to be factored into our methods. Bear in mind, there are about 82 million people in Germany living in an area half the size of Texas! Another reason is our land ownership, which similar to Texas, is all privately-owned.

The German hunting system is not a license system. You can't buy a license and go hunt. The right to hunt is strictly connected to the right of property. That means the

I BET WHEN YOU SHOW UP IN CAMP THERE AREN'T 100 OTHER HUNTERS GEARED UP AND AN EIGHT-PIECE BRASS BAND CHEERING YOU ON.



Hunters are required to remain at their stations at all times.

Photo by Michael Breuer

exclusive language has evolved among the hunters. These traditions and rites may seem somewhat strange and old-fashioned to hunters not from this region.

Nevertheless, the musicians play the traditional “Greeting,” followed by a piece with the beautiful name, “Halali,” which is a sort of hymn for the hunt. It is indeed an impressive spectacle, and when listening to these exalting sounds, one can’t help but feel an inner sense of awe and dignity that glorifies the anticipation and devotion to the hunt. As the music subsides, the hunt organizer introduces the assistants (these are hunters that help in the organization of the hunt and will bring the rest of us to our respective positions) and assigns all hunters to the various groups. Then he emphatically points out the legal safety regulations and precautions, sets down the time plan and reviews the game that we are allowed to hunt. Primarily, it is open season on the European wild boar (*Sus scrofa*), the fox and the raccoon dog, roe does may, however, also be taken down. Open season on roe bucks ended in October, so they are excluded from the hunt. In conclusion, he informs us that today there will be 103 hunters taking part in four hunting areas covering 3,000 hectares (about 7,500 acres).

Together with eight others, I am assigned to a young guide named Hubert, who briefly elaborates on a map where we will be posted. Our location is along a small forest road in the middle of a large wooden terrain. The preparation of the driven hunt is perfectly organized so that all hunters with designated positions are clearly identified through a respective number. In an off-road vehicle, we are brought to our respective location and Hubert specifically explains the procedure to each hunter as he drops them off at their designated position. When it is my turn, he tells me that I am not allowed to move from my post during the hunt and that all game shot can only be claimed when the hunt is over. He also specifies that I may shoot in advance or retreat of the game, but not to the side, because the nearest hunters are already located at a distance of approximately 200 meters to the left and right of my position.

Unlike driven hunts in some southern states like Mississippi or Alabama, where shotguns and buckshot are commonly used, in Germany, centerfire rifles are used and the minimum caliber

Understandably, I was especially pleased and curious when I was invited to a driven hunt in Bavaria in the southeast of Germany.

THE HUNT

As I arrive at the designated meeting point shortly before 8 a.m. on the day of the hunt, there are already many other hunters and game drivers present, in part accompanied by their hunting dogs. Green and orange are the predominant colors of the day, green out of tradition and orange, other than regular hunts, because of legal safety concerns when there are more than six participants in the hunt.

I am astonished at the magnitude of this hunt. There are about 100 hunters in attendance, in addition to about 40 game drivers and 20 hunting dogs. The hunt organizer, an elderly gent with a big bushy beard, welcomes the guests with only a few words and then, to my startled amazement, a group of eight hunters start playing a musical introduction to the hunt on their horn instruments.

Aside from the hunting signals played on horn instruments and the traditional breaking of branches from a tree, the use and meaning of which I will elaborate on later, it seems an entire and

Rules of the Game

GAME MANAGEMENT in Germany is a responsibility and a duty, therefore, you won't find trophy hunting. The objective is to maintain a healthy wildlife population – 50/50 ratio of male and female, 50

percent young, 30 percent middle aged and 20 percent old animals. By law, we have to shoot fawns as well as does and young bucks.

Landowners are ethically mandated to manage the wildlife on their property or rent the rights to someone who will exercise that right. These rights are rented for nine years and the price varies depending on what type of game is present. Roe deer and wild boar are fairly common species, but renting the rights to property having red deer can get pricey.

Yes, you still have to have a license or permit to hunt. For foreigners, there is a 10-day license or an annual license available. You can obtain these through the Hunting Authority or “Untere Jagdbehörde” with certain requirements, including a passport, gun permits and hunting liability insurance.

There are outfitters and tour operators in Germany that can accommodate hunts, and most packages for roe buck, red deer or wild boar are single hunter outings from treestands or still hunting. Driven hunts are possible, but require advance planning.

IN THE *Field*

allowed is about a .270. Most organizers do not allow shotguns, even those with sabot slugs. I'm using a combination over-and-under shotgun/rifle chambered in 7x65R, but very popular on driven hunts are bolt action or semi-automatics in 9.3x62 or the gold old 30-06 also does a perfect job.

The hunt for me begins the moment I am in position and load my gun and ends at exactly 1 p.m. Shooting after that time period is strictly prohibited (regardless of how many wild boar there may be in sight), because at that time, there will be other hunters under way claiming their kill.

It is 8:35 in the morning as they drop me off and I take my position. The game drivers and dogs will proceed at 9 a.m. through the woods in their attempt to push the wild boar out of the thicket in our direction. This means I still have a little bit of time until the action starts.



Photo by Magnus Pelz



The author with his Russian boar.


Photo by Magnus Pelz

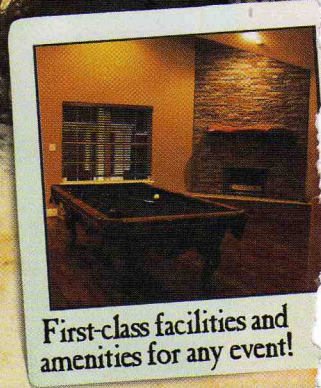
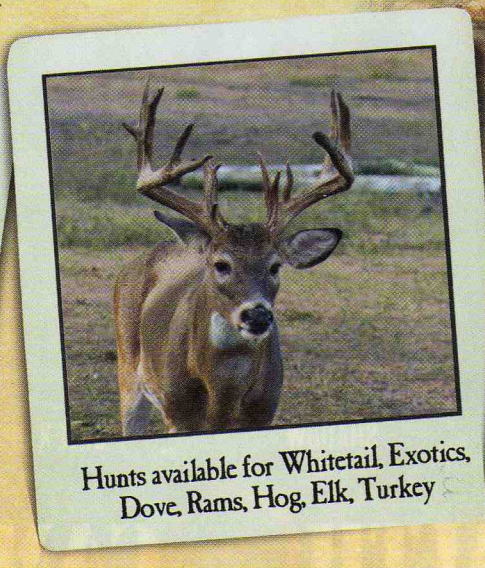


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In suspense, I await what is to come; I've got my scope reduced to three times the magnification, knowing that any shot I get will be close and fast. Then it starts; to the minute, exactly at 9 a.m. I hear the dogs barking far off, as well as the calls of some of the game drivers echoing in my direction. It doesn't take long and the first shot fired can be heard somewhere in the distance, then more. In my immediate vicinity everything is still quiet, but I hear the front line of dogs and drivers coming closer. Systematically, they crisscross the terrain, yelling out loud, not only to move the game ahead of them, but also to let us know where they are. Then suddenly the first movement: Scared up by the noise, a wild sow and her five young are on the move at a rapid pace about 200 meters distance. They aren't running as fast as they can, yet fast enough so that a shot at this distance is out of the question. Just as they disappear from sight, I hear

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a shot close by. Apparently, they were close enough to the hunter positioned next to me, who took a shot. If he hit his mark and got one of the young, I can only guess. Two roe bucks fleeing from the noise of the drivers and dogs pass right in front of me.

Nothing happens for quite awhile, aside from this or that shot heard somewhere in the distance. All of a sudden, the excitement is back, as a full grown wild boar with tusks, all by himself, is gradually coming in my direction. Very skillfully, he uses the bushes and thicket for cover, so that I can't get a clear shot at him and when he finally reaches a somewhat open area, he is to the left of me, a direction in which I can't shoot, due to the location of my fellow hunters. What a lucky boar – right between me and the hunter to my left, he crosses through the row and over the hill he goes to live happily ever after, the one that got away.

Again I hear a rustling, it is coming closer, but already from a distance I can see the orange colored vest that is worn by all the dogs used in the hunt. Following only his nose, the Weimaraner works his way through the thicket, totally ignoring me, disappears behind some trees, then reappears and before you know it he is gone. In the meantime, the calls of the drivers are coming ever closer; now and then I can already see the blinking of their reflecting vests through the trees. One of the drivers walks by close to me, gives me a friendly greeting and continues calling loudly on his way as his group moves on through the woods.

Now it is important to be alert, I was told, for it does happen none too often, that wild boar will hide deep in the thicket, let the drivers pass and then sneak off on the sly in the opposite direction. True enough: I hear a crackling noise, a rustling and then audible snorting and suddenly there are three wild boars of approximately the same size passing right in front of me. The youth in their prime, macho teenagers from the previous year, yet they can weigh up to 70 kilos or about 150 pounds. They aren't in any particular hurry, in the assumption that the danger has passed. How wrong they are, I take

the last of the three into my sights, follow him slowly and evenly, then with about 10 centimeters headway, I pull the trigger. He goes down with the shot and doesn't move, I reload as fast as I can, but all I can see from the other two boars is the bristle on their tail.

It is 20 minutes past noon and my boar is within sight, yet I must wait patiently another 40 minutes until I can claim my kill. Waiting becomes even more difficult, because nothing else happens, there is no game to be seen anywhere. The waiting is finally over and I can go to the baggage claim and pull my boar over to my obser-

carpet of fir branches, each with a broken branch in their mouth. This tradition is known as "the last bite;" it is in honor of the slain game and meant to remind the hunter to take special heed of nature and the animals.

In the German hunting tradition, every animal has their own hunting call, so now, played on the horn instruments we hear the tones of "the boar is dead" and then the sounds of "the roe is dead." In conclusion they play "the hunt is over!" One can hardly describe the atmosphere, the sound of the horns, the bounty of the day, the many hunters, all silent, listening



Photo by Magnus Peitz

German traditions of honoring the kill are a big part of the hunt.

vation post, which turns out to be not that easy, because 70 kilos can become real heavy when the ground is soaking wet. Just at that time, 10 minutes after the one o'clock deadline, a tractor comes along and we load the boar onto the trailer, which already has several dead boar occupants. I am allowed to sit in the tractor.

Arriving at the meeting point, I become witness to an unbelievably moving hunting tradition, the "laying of the bounty!" The bounty of the day's hunt, 18 wild boar and two roe does are laid in a row on a

in awe to the music and its meaning. The spirit captures everyone and as the last sound fades away, no one moves. Slowly one gets back to the business at hand and nature's game is loaded into a cooling chamber for transport.

In the evening, the hunters meet in the local village inn, a congenial setting to enjoy wild boar goulash and a cool beer while telling hunting stories. You had to know there would be beer involved! ♣

Radioactive Fallout

ON APRIL 26, 1986, Central Europe was blanketed by a cloud of radioactive fallout after a reactor accident in Chernobyl's nuclear power plant. Huge swathes of land were contaminated with radiation.

The late-term consequences of this nuclear catastrophe are still evident in Germany even today. Radioactive contamination of wildlife, caused by this incident, is still measurable everywhere – especially in the venison of Bavaria's wild boar population.

Radioactive cesium, which had accumulated on every outdoors surface after the incident, was transported into deeper ground layers and from there, it was absorbed by the roots of plants and mushrooms.

Those plants serve as the primary food source for many game animals, and so the Cesium finds its way into the digestive systems of wild boar and deer, where it is mainly deposited in the muscular structure.

Since wild boar are fond of mushrooms, which are particularly efficient at storing radioactivity, the contamination level of their meat with Cs 137 (radioactive Cesium) is especially high.

For the hunters, this means that piece of wild boar venison has to be checked not only for trichina but also for radiation before it can be sold or consumed. Across Bavaria, measuring stations have been established. In practice, this means that about 800 to 1000 grams of innards of every boar shot have to be delivered to a measuring station, where the sample is then analyzed.

The European Union has set the limit for radioactive trace elements in comestible goods at 600 Bq (Becquerel units of radioactive Cesium per kilogram).

Venison with more than 600 Bq may not be traded or consumed. However, hunters can apply for reimbursement from the Federal Office of Administration, if an analysis of their venison results in a contamination factor of more than 600 Bq per kilogram. Every application for reimbursement has to be filed separately through each district's local government administration – the Kreisverwaltungsamt. – Magnus Pelz

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