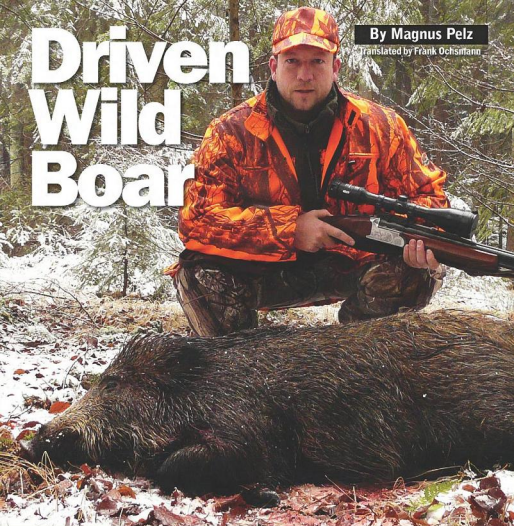


Driven Wild Boar

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Hunting in Germany is quite different from that known to the Australian hunter down under. There are two main reasons for this; for one, the high population density in Central Europe (in Germany alone there are approximately 82 million people living in an area one-third the size of South Australia), the other reason is the hunting system, which, as in almost all of Europe is based on privately owned hunting grounds. Understandably, I was especially pleased and curious when I was invited to a driven hunt in Bavaria in the south-east of Germany.

As I arrive at the designated meeting point shortly before 8:00am 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 6 participants in the hunt. I am astonished at the magnitude of this hunt, as the hunt organizer, an elderly gentleman with a big bushy beard requests everyone's attention, there are about 100 hunters in attendance, that in addition to about 40 game drivers and 20 hunting dogs. He 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.

At this point, I want to take a moment to explain German hunting tradition. For several centuries, the hunt has been an integral part of social life in Germany and in Europe as a whole, whereby it is easy to understand that many traditions, rites and customs were formed and have become an integrated part of the hunt. 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 exclusive language has evolved among the hunters. These traditions and rites may seem somewhat strange and old fashioned to hunters not from this locality.

Nevertheless, the musical horn section plays the traditional 'Greeting' followed by a piece with the beautiful name 'Halalé', 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 organiser resumes word, introduces the assistants (these are hunters that help in the organisation 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 on a total of 3,000 hectares comprised of four hunting areas.

Together with 8 others, I am assigned to a young hunter 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 wooded terrain. The preparation of the driven hunt is perfectly organised 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 metres to the left and right of my position. The hunt for me begins the moment I am in position and load my weapon and ends at exactly 1:00pm. 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 underway 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 9:00am 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. In suspense I await what is to come with my weapon loaded and my scope reduced to 3 times the magnification. Then it starts; to the minute, exactly at 9:00am 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 metres 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 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 everafter, 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 thickest, 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. 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 twenty minutes past noon and 'my boar' is within vision, 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 observation post, which turns out to be not that easy, because 70 kilos can become real heavy when the ground is soggy wet. Just at that time, ten 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 layed in a row on a 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 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. What a wonderful way to end a great day.



Roe deer stag and boar mount on display in the hunting lodge