



# The solitude of the countryside

*“Deer stalkers represent a major resource for the effective management of deer, including the control of deer damage to farming, forestry and nature conservation interests”*

British Association of Shooting & Conservation

The Francis Lovel & Co Group are keen to promote responsible shooting and ethical hunting in all its forms. As well as offering our customers first class clay pigeon shooting at The Oxfordshire Shooting School and Atkin Grant & Lang, we also endeavour to provide the finest sporting experiences in a more natural environment. The team are here to not only arrange these adventures, but also to offer guidance and support.

We recently organised a deer stalk for one of our members in the beautiful Cotswold countryside. I caught up with Gary afterwards to find out more about his experience.

“I joined AGL a few years ago and received instruction from Julian (Head Instructor & Sporting Coordinator at Atkin Grant & Lang). Having attended a few simulated days, which were great fun, I tried my first driven game day last October, arranged by AGL, and thoroughly enjoyed the whole experience. Moving to deer stalking seemed like a natural progression, especially as it combined my love of the outdoors with a passion I had for target rifle shooting. I shot my first small bore rifle at the age of 12 and then moved to full bore, which I shot until my early 20's - a long time ago!

Prior to the date of my first stalk I did my research, read books on deer stalking and also met with Julian, who went through the basics and allowed me to practice a few shots using sticks - something I never did in my target rifle days. This, together with more practice with The Keeper and my guide on the day before the stalk, built up my confidence.

The morning of the stalk was an early start before dawn. Myself and my guide were dropped off at a remote part of the estate and began the quest to find deer. An hour later we came across a group of Roe that were in an ideal position, 125 meters away. We crept up to a low dry stone wall and my guide handed me the rifle. And that's when it happened. My heart started to pound - it was as if I'd just run a 100m world record! Apparently, this is quite common and is known as 'buck fever' - the nervous excitement of a novice deer stalker, caused by a massive amount of adrenaline flowing into the blood stream.

After a few deep breaths, I took aim, squeezed the trigger and my first deer dropped. It was a clean dispatch.

Following the gralloching, we continued stalking until late morning, but the deer proved elusive. We returned to the The Bell (the pub that I was staying at) for a much needed coffee and time to reflect on a day I shall never forget. The whole experience was memorable. Just as those who have shot game will always remember their first game day and indeed the very first pheasant or partridge they took, it's the same with deer stalking. It may even be more intense than driven game, as you have to seek out your quarry and the dispatch, seen through a telescopic sight, is a far more visceral experience. I must say that after my first stalk I was hooked. One of the aspects I love most about stalking, even if a deer opportunity doesn't present itself, and there is no guarantee that it will - is simply experiencing the solitude of the countryside and the sights and sounds it contains. I now have a few more stalks booked and have recently taken my DSC1 course and exam at Atkin Grant & Lang.

The whole experience was well organised, with great accommodation and food at The Bell Langford and expert, friendly tuition from the Head Keeper of the estate and my guide, who made me feel very welcome.”

Deer stalking is a vital part of keeping our natural environment balanced. Although incredibly elegant and graceful creatures, they can cause a lot of damage and it is imperative to keep their numbers at a healthy level for the natural resources available to feed and shelter them throughout the year. If populations get too large, they can not only cause damage to farmland, forests and nature conservations, but also run low on adequate food supplies in their territory and spread disease throughout the herd. Stalking is a humane way to control the numbers without interfering with the land and natural surroundings. It also allows the quarry to go back into the food chain providing a lean, nutritious meat.

If you would like more information about stalking, please email [julian@agl-uk.com](mailto:julian@agl-uk.com) or call 01582 849382.