



Hunting the Lord's Deer

All Hallow's Day in Ireland

Story and Photos by
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Lord Rosse (pronounced *Ross*) stood in his monogrammed sport coat gesturing toward the next room. As we passed by, each of us were handed a miniature wine glass filled with a blood red liquid.

“Step into the parlor and we shall have us a toast. I made the gin myself.” He continued as he sashayed into the great room adorned with lavish furnishings and a painting of Anne Boleyn. “It is a special recipe made from sloe berries and potcheen (Irish moonshine).” We tipped our glasses, and the taste resembled cough syrup as much as the color.

Birr Castle, home of Lord and Lady Rosse (above)

This is the keep gate. It spans the dry moat that circles Birr Castle.



When Lord Rosse, the only British Lord residing in Ireland, heard that several American outdoor journalist were going to be hunting his estate, he insisted we all, “come up to the castle for a spot of tea.” After Rosse’s gin, tea would have been welcome. We were mostly the audience and he the entertainment, though I am sure he saw it differently. For the better part of two hours Lord Rosse regaled us with the history of his castle, his family and Ireland.

William Brendan Parsons is the seventh Earl of Rosse. His family history dates back to five English brothers who arrived in Ireland in the late 16th century.



Irish hunting guide, Mervin Kenehan, sets the shooting sticks for Christian Pfeil of Heym to take a shot in the frosty hours of the morning.

There is a rich tradition of astronomy and engineering in the Parsons family, and Birr Castle, the site of our little soiree, is the home of what in the 1840's was the largest reflecting telescope in the world. It, by the way, was designed by the third Earl of Rosse and is within sight of the castle.

When done with us, Lord Rosse announced tea time was over, and a butler clad in a button-down, white shirt and black jeans showed us the door. Under a vibrant Hallow Eve moon we drove through the keep gate and over the dry moat, leaving the Lord to his gin and pâté.

Two other American hunting writers and I were in Ireland by invitation of Heym. Heym, long recognized as a manufacturer of fine quality double rifles, drillings (three barrels) and even veirlings (four barrels), was founded in Suhl, Germany in 1865 by Fredrich Wilhelm Heym. Heym is now located in Gleichamberg, a small town about 25 miles from Suhl. In addition to crafting some of the finest multi-barrel rifles on planet Earth, they also build exquisite

This fallow doe was taken by the author on the evening of the first day's hunt.



bolt action repeating rifles, which they are now exporting to the United States. We were there to field test these rifles and report back to American shooters.

Island Sports, located in Ireland, is one of Heym's most active dealers. John O'Malley is the proprietor of Island Sports,

and he arranged for us to hunt the Lord Rosse estate. This was possible because a close friend of O'Malley's, Liam Kenehan, leases the right to hunt deer on the 32,000 acres belonging to Lord Rosse.

While Lord Rosse realizes limited income from the deer lease, timber is much more profitable. Rosse considers deer nibbling his young trees a nuisance. Because of this, he dictates a minimum number of deer to be removed from the estate each year. Fallow deer, introduced to Ireland in the 13th century by the Normans, are the predominant species on the estate; however, native red deer exist there in limited numbers. On the last day of the calendar year, Liam must present to Lord Rosse a predetermined number of deer tails. Our job was to help Liam collect tails for the Lord and meat for his family's freezer.

The preferred method of hunting is spot and stalk, and for two days I trailed behind my young guide, Mervin Kenehan, Liam's son. Mervin literally grew up hunting deer on the estate and knew every contour



Hunters stalking an Irish forest in late evening (Photo by Patsy Reidy)

of the land as well as the areas deer were using. Mervin was a pleasant fellow who could peel the hide from a deer faster than any human I have seen. However, I found it amusing that under excitement his Irish accent could turn the English language into a roll of vowels as Greek as Arabic to me.

We prowled the Irish countryside in County Offlay from dawn to dusk with a short break for lunch each day. The landscape was a mixture of rolling meadows, hardwoods and conifer forests. Under dense evergreen canopies we walked in moss as green and thick as shag carpet in a 70's penthouse. Slipping through the misty gloom, there were moments I expected to see a unicorn or armor-clad knight materialize from the blackness of the forest. Enchanting as this was, during the first morning's hunt I sensed a haunting presence.

Understandable, considering the night before was Halloween, a tradition originating in Ireland and known as *Samhain Night*. Samhain Night was a

Celtic "end of summer" festival where the dead were thought to revisit the mortal world. Was it the ghosts of my Irish tenant farmer ancestors looking over my shoulder as I walked the once feudal estate, or was it the fog of the Irish whiskey from the night before?

Regardless, my first of five fallow deer fell less than 30 minutes into the first morning. We stalked within 40 yards of a small group as they fed through a fairy tale looking forest. It was a young doe and Mervin was especially excited for the tender venison it would yield. When my kin left Ireland, hunting was a landowner's privilege not generally enjoyed by the peasantry. Kneeling beside the deer with my hand buried deep in its soft coat, I thought, *Not anymore*. Later as the sun burned the misty gloom from the forest, an eerie weight seemed to lift from my shoulders.

Our second day in the field was much like the first, uncharacteristically dry with a heavy frost blanketing the countryside.

My last deer, a spike buck or *pricket* as they are called in Ireland, was a long shot across an open field. Mervin spotted him just at dusk as we were watching a ridiculously large group of cock pheasants feeding along a stone wall bordering the meadow.

In all, our party took 17 fallow deer; 15 doe and two prickets. Christian Pfeil, Heym's business development manager for the United States, had a brief opportunity at a nice stag, but a safe shot never materialized. All of this is now history. Lord Rosse made it a point to show us the game book for the Rosse estate during our visit to Birr Castle, and in it a record of our hunt will be inscribed. This incredible, handwritten volume details every hunt occurring on the property for more than 400 years.

After our last day of hunting, our entire party had a marvelous meal at the Monk's Kitchen, a restaurant located in the dungeon of Kinnitty Castle. (Kinnitty Castle is located about 30 minutes from

Birr. It is where we stayed for the duration of the hunt.) We talked of our Irish ancestry, shared hunting adventures from all over the world, and toasted our health and success.

We managed it all without Lord Rosse's medicine-like gin.

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Richard Mann was born, raised and currently resides in West Virginia along the Virginia border. He has been an avid outdoorsman all his life and has hunted on four continents. He is currently a field editor for the National Rifle Association's *Shooting Illustrated* magazine and regularly contributes to numerous hunting and firearms periodicals. Richard works as a firearms consultant for several companies and is the compiling author of the newly released book, *Rifle Bullets for the Hunter*. Signed copies may be purchased directly at www.ramworks.net. He can be reached at ramworks@frontiernet.net.



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