

preferred to stay on the ground in the thick cover rather than fly. The birds that flew poorly when first flushed flew very well when pushed, and the birds flew better as the day progressed. Birds were very plentiful, and finding large groups made for exciting shooting.

Our half-day, morning hunt included 27 points, not counting birds that were flushed and pointed again. We flushed 91 birds and killed 55. Other birds escaped without flying.

The base price for that half-day hunt is \$250 per hunter with a limit of 12 birds per hunter. The extra birds are \$7.50 apiece, bringing our total to \$732.50. Full-day hunts cost \$600 per hunter with

a 15-bird limit, and include lodging, three meals, cocktails, bird cleaning, guide, dogs, in-field refreshments, field transportation and free fishing in the lodge's lake before, between or after hunts.

Cottonwoods limits hunting parties to four people with only two shooting at one time. An eight-person party may be broken into three groups.

Hunters must provide a valid Alabama hunting license, shotgun, shells, boots and clothing. Thorn bushes and briars make brush pants necessary. Alabama's unpredictable winter weather with its frequent rain and wide temperature swings means hunters should prepare for anything from temperatures in

the high 20s to shirtsleeve weather. Rain gear is necessary and hunters would be well advised to pack both light hunting boots and rubber boots.

Cottonwoods is located three miles from Uniontown, Ala., a two-hour drive from either the Montgomery or Birmingham airport. The drive from Montgomery is virtually all four-lane divided highway. The drive from Birmingham is split between interstate and two-lane roads. Transportation from either airport can be arranged in advance.

Cottonwoods Sportsman's Lodge, Montgomery Smith, 334-289-0188, www.cottonwoodslodge.com.

—Robert DeWitt

Wing Shooting in the Shadow of Colorado's Book Cliff Mountain Range

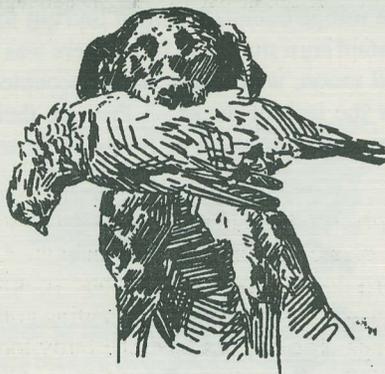
- Hunt for pheasant, chukar, Hungarian partridge
- Combo trips for big game, trout available
- **Timetable:** September through February
- **Accommodations:** Rustic guesthouses
- **Food:** Hearty country cooking with a regional flare
- **Hunt:** Easy to Moderate

The owners and camp management of **High Lonesome Ranch** have worked tirelessly over the past decade to create a world-class sporting experience. With a 70 percent repeat business, they clearly have succeeded.

The terrain, like the different bird species available, is a pleasant mixed bag. Some walk-up hunts are through wheat, sedan grass, milo or rye fields, while others are held in sagebrush that provides ample hiding places for birds. Walking through the grasses is easy, but the going gets a little tougher in the low, scraggly, sagebrush. It seems, though, that there are always pathways through the brush. It's exciting to see birds flush into the open from the brushy cover. The ranch has over 50,000 acres, which means there is no shortage of cover to hunt.

Dateline: Colorado

There are native blue grouse on the property, but their small numbers make them a fringe benefit to any hunt. On our hunt, daily flushes on the grouse averaged around eight, with as many as 24 starts on a good day. High Lonesome is looking to work with an adjoining property that has



a significant blue grouse population, and if the deal concludes, then grouse hunts will be prioritized for 2008.

High Lonesome has six resident bird guides and six lodge dogs. **Todd Weiszbrod** is the head bird-hunting guide and uses one of the five pointing labs or the golden retriever for hunts. Many times he will run two dogs in tandem and favors the pointing dog/flushing dog combination. Additional off-ranch guides are brought in to accommodate larger groups. The close-working dogs are never more than 20 to 30 yards in front of hunters, but when the birds clear the cover, they don't wait around.

Weiszbrod suggests clients bring either 12- or 20-gauge shotguns choked modified to full. He favors shot sizes 5 or 6. The lodge has a selection of Ruger and Browning 12- and 20-gauge shotguns for rent, and shells and other hunting gear are available for purchase in its pro shop.

The lodge offers two types of warm-up shooting: Five-Stand and a Pheasant Walk. Shooting typically starts at the well designed Five-Stand which offers a mix of technical and hunting shots. The Pheasant Walk moves from the formality of shooting butts to the field; the 15-minute walk-through-cover course features clays flung to simulate various bird-flushing patterns. All clays are thrown from state-of-the-art electric traps.

After a suitable warm up, it's time for the hunt. A typical day involves two hunts, three hours each, with a break for lunch. Ranch policy is for no more than three hunters per guide. Rain is seldom a variable in the Western Slope of the Rockies, but both heat and altitude play a factor. Temperatures during the hunting season range from 45 to 75 degrees with the warmer temperatures in September and October. Every guide's truck is fully stocked with bottled-water and soft drinks to ensure a guest's proper hydration. There's no such thing as drinking "too much" water here. The ranch's elevation is around 6,000 feet, so hunters from near sea level will want to exercise prior to visiting High Lonesome.

Aunt Linda, the camp cook, makes

sure that no one goes hungry at **High Lonesome**. A Louisiana native, Aunt Linda prepares delicious gourmet/country meals with a Southwestern flare. Breakfast varies from pancakes with Maine blueberries and Vermont Maple syrup to Huevos Rancheros and homemade bread-toast. Custom-built sandwiches with potato salad and fresh fruit are common lunch meals. Prime rib, fried chicken or steak enchiladas with cornbread, fried okra or a side-salad are for dinner. Her pheasant quesadillas are not to be missed. Aunt Linda features 10 different desserts, each of which is baked from scratch. Strawberry shortcake, cream puffs with homemade chocolate sauce and fresh-whipped cream or berry cobblers with ice cream are favorites. White or red wines, soft drinks, sweet tea or lemonade accompany dinner, and coffee follows with dessert.

The rustic, ranch-style guesthouses were recently remodeled. Large bedrooms are off a main living room and a full kitchen. **Camp Manager Buzz Cox** stocks each guesthouse with a variety of non-alcoholic beverages in the refrigerator, several bottles of red and white wine and a variety of snacks. **The views from both houses are spectacular: they over look mountain ranges, trout ponds and fields with mule deer or elk feeding at first or last light.** Cox frequently brings in different Bluegrass bands for after dinner "around-the-campfire" performances. Guests supply their own hard liquor or beer.

High Lonesome's location means that mobile phone service and wireless Internet access are minimal to non-existent. The lodge does have hard lines for phone calls, and high-speed Internet is available in the main lodge.

2008 bird hunt costs: \$2,300 per person for a two-day/three-night all-inclusive package; \$3,000 each for three days/four nights. Shotgun rentals: \$50/day; shells, \$6/box for target loads and \$13 for field loads.

The ranch has over 300 shallow, spring-fed ponds loaded with big trout, as well as a trophy elk and mule deer herd. The lodge does a significant amount of combination packages, from a trout fishing/bird hunting trip to a big game/bird hunting trip. High Lonesome Ranch can accommodate large or corporate groups as well. It is located in De Beque, a 40-minute drive from the Grand Junction airport.

High Lonesome Ranch, Buzz and Rose Cox, 970-283-9420, www.thehighlonesomeranch.com.

—Tom Keer

Dateline: Missouri

The Fort Knox of Ducks

- Hunt success determined by weather
- Nearby refuge attracts thousands of waterfowl
- **Timetable:** Early to mid-November
- **Accommodations:** Converted farmhouse
- **Food:** Plain fare
- **Hunt:** Easy

I felt as if I were standing outside Fort Knox but without the keys. There were an estimated 198,000 ducks on Squaw Creek National Wildlife Refuge in Northwest Missouri and I was hunting 50 yards from its boundary. But big numbers of birds don't always equal daily limits. **In three four-hour hunts with Pro Outfitters, I did not fire a shot and my son killed the only suicidal duck we saw. It wasn't for lack of potential.** Thousands of ducks streamed westward off the refuge, headed probably to the Missouri River. Few even paused at the sound of a hail call before flying high enough to cause nosebleed even in a duck. There are so many light geese on the refuge that, when they fly and are spotlighted against the distant loess bluffs, they look like a blizzard.

Light geese always tend to spiral upward toward the stratosphere within the refuge boundaries, then line out for distant corn stubble to feed. There was a full moon, which may have accounted for the lack of ducks — they ate their way well into the wee hours while we



slept, then slept while we hunted. We saw ducks in historic numbers, but ice-up and maybe just plain bad luck conspired against us. No outfitter can promise a limit or even many good shots.

Pro Outfitters offers five pit blinds, each accommodating a half-dozen or so hunters. A policy of guiding a maximum of 10 hunters at a time, however, leaves clients free to arrange as many or as few hunters per blind as they want. There are

two or three guides available, depending on circumstances. **Pro Outfitters owner Brad Hannaway** leases 7,000 acres in four areas in Northwest Missouri.

The converted farmhouse can sleep 10 hunters in a comfortable, but no-frills situation: bunk beds or single beds, four persons to a room. Dogs are welcome. There are three motels nearby, two in Mound City and one several miles south on Interstate 29, but virtually all hunters opt to stay in the farmhouse. The guides do the cooking and they're good at hunter fare, simple things like deer chili or pork chops with baked beans: ample and hearty.

There are plans to build a modern lodge in the loess bluffs overlooking the wildlife refuge, but that won't be fact until at least 2009. Hannaway is looking for additional hunter housing for 2008.

In addition to ducks, goose species available include Canada, light and speckled belly. Daily charges for waterfowl hunts at Pro Outfitters are \$250.

In addition to a federal waterfowl stamp, nonresident permits required are migratory bird (\$6) and small game (\$75 or a daily permit, \$11). Hunters need proof of hunter certification.