

"White Smoke" in Spain

by

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"Collection" can mean a lot of different things to a hunter. A group of guns that he paid too much for and does not use, or all of the trophies that adorn his walls, and so on. For me, Collection took on a new meaning this fall when my wife Kay and I were "collected" by Alfonso Fabres, Jr. of HUNTINSPAIN at our Hotel in Madrid, Spain for the trip to the Fabres family home in the country some twenty minutes from the ancient city of Salamanca. I could go on and on about the Fabres 17th century fighting bull ranch and the bulls we saw, but this story is about the hunt. There has not been a muzzle loading hunter in this area in the 20 years that Alfonso Fabres, Sr. has been running the premier outfitting service in Spain. My Knight MK 85 caused quite a stir in the local hunting community, everyone wanted to see the rifle and to keep a sample of the 325 gr. Red Hot bullets I was using. Luckily I had an extra pack so souvenirs of the visit of the "White Smoke Hunter" did not run me short of bullets for purpose I had brought them--hunting Spanish Red Stag and Fallow Deer.

The Hunt started at the crack of a rainy dawn, in Spain that is about 7:45 in the morning, to the sound of the roar of Stags in rut. The rut, combined with being guided by Alfonso Fabres, Jr., a young man who has literally grown up in the hunting business, made stalking the first big sounding stag a lot of fun. With Alfonso in the lead, we moved through open pastures and dense oak brush like a ghost in the forest being followed by a baby Rhino. Still by 10:15, when the roar died out for the day, we had approached and passed on 2 very nice Stags and had seen a really big Fallow Deer. The Fallow was in the brush about 50 meters (we are in Spain and a yard is the grassy area in the front of your house) away. After a short look I shouldered the rifle, took aim, and was immediately reminded of the old saying "Keep your powder dry". The cap went off but not the rifle--the second time in my life this had happened while looking at a huge Fallow Buck. The deer looked back at me and then decided to relocate to Portugal, never to be seen again. At this late hour the only civilized thing to do was to return to the house for breakfast and a siesta. Siesta is probably the very best tradition that the Spanish people ever gave the rest of the world.



That afternoon, after cleaning and reloading the rifle, Alfonso, Jr and I again hit the field to the sound of roaring stags. The plan for the afternoon was to stalk in an area owned by a neighboring village and then take a stand in a "high seat", if necessary, the last hour before dark. Well, when I saw the high seat, the stalk was over. From the 25 foot high blind you could see about 6 acres of the most beautiful and game filled land I have ever seen. Stags and hinds were running around like teenagers at play on the beach. It was spectacular. After about an hour we spotted a really big stag working the area. You know the story of the two bulls on the hill, while the younger stags were running all around, he was just walking,

and in our direction. I watched him for 10 minutes before he came into range. With a belch of smoke and sparks, the rifle performed perfectly this time. The shot penetrated both lungs and the heart and still had the energy to break the off side front leg. The stag of my dreams was down in his tracks. At just under 100 meters, neither the type of propellant or the way you load your rifle matters very much. If the bullet hits the right place it gets the job done.

When we got back to the ranch that evening with the stag, over a great bottle of great Spanish wine, the final count was made. What I had thought was a 7x8 came out to be a 8x9 point Stag. The highest possible compliment was paid to the animal when Alfonso, Sr. said that he would be proud to place an animal of that size in his trophy room.

The next morning the hunt took us to a new area with totally different terrain. Gone were the open rolling pastures and scrub oaks. We were on the edge of the mountains. Gone also was the abundance of game movement. In the higher altitudes it was raining and raining hard. Kay had joined us and we all spent most of the early morning glassing for Fallow Deer with almost no luck. But the Stags and Hinds ignored the weather and put on a show for us in a mountain meadow some 500 to 700 meters away. This gave Kay a feel for what I had been trying to describe to her from the day before.

At this point I must deviate from the strict reporting of the black powder hunt to describe a Spanish tradition that occurred after the morning hunt. We left the mountains and joined a group of Spanish shotgunners as guests of Sonny and Jo-Ann Ferre of Puerto Rico and Spain for a driven Redleg Partridge shoot. As in everything that Alfonso Fabres does, this was absolutely first class. Shooting stations are drawn and a pre-set rotation is established to make sure that each shooter has an equal chance. Loaders and secretaries are chosen and then shooters in dress shirts, neck ties and vests or in Jo-Ann's case, world champion lady's shooting attire, took up positions on the shooting line. Beaters drove the birds down a valley and when the shooting started it was amazing. For a long time American wing shooter this was something to see. Shoot and hand the gun to the loader while reaching for another, perfectly matched side by side double I might add, and shoot again. The shoot lasted about thirty minutes. With everyone talking about the good shots, the doubles they took, and mostly the spectacular misses, the birds were retrieved and counted. Then the whole setup was moved to another valley and repeated three more times. It would take a whole story to do a driven Partridge shoot justice and this is not the time or place but suffice it to say it was an experience not to be missed if you are a shotgunner.



Well, back to the Fallow hunt. Get up, have "cafe" and be in the field by 8:00 am. The plan for this morning was for the three of us to return to the area of the first morning hunt, sit in a "high seat" stand and look for the big buck who had been saved by the damp powder. This was a good plan but it appeared that he was still tied up with his Portuguese language lessons and did not return. At

about 9:15 a slightly smaller cousin showed up on the next hill to take over the duties of the rut that had been left unfulfilled. So it was out of the stand and on to the stalk.

The wind was wrong and the brush was too thick, so the stalk was not successful but the scenery and the Muflons were magnificent. A note is in order here, Muflon hunting in this area is great. We saw a number of great Muflon Rams that would have been in range for a modern rifle. But since we were hunting Fallow Deer, no effort was made to approach.

After the required siesta and lunch, it was off to another piece of magnificent scenery. While still in the truck we spotted a herd of Fallows up wind and undisturbed. Kay remained in the truck with the camera while Alfonso, Jr. and I started the stalk. Using the sparsely spaced oak trees and what little brush was available, we closed to within about a half of a kilometer before the herd moved. Alfonso decided that they were moving to water so we broke off and headed for the water hole. The big buck was at the edge of the herd when we arrived at the edge of the only cover near the water. After some glassing I decided that this was my Fallow Buck. He was a gorgeous breeding male with vibrant spotting and full graying of the neck, a very wide rack with nice palms with no broken points. This was the best shot we were going to get and though at the edge of the range limit it was takable. One shot and the buck was down.



When Kay arrived with the truck, much to my amazement, she told me what I had thought was a 30 or 40 minute stalk had actually taken one hour and forty five minutes and covered almost seven kilometers. She had also had a big Stag walk to within 50 feet of the truck and was quite put out that we had not brought her rifle on that hunt. I can't wait to see her photos of him if they come out.

The use of a black powder rifle with its limited range and the thought of no second shot has definitely added a great amount of thrill and excitement to my hunting. The need to approach closer, stalk more efficiently, and plan and place the shot better has made me a complete convert to the old pack it from the front type of rifle. Though its limitations must always be in mind, black powder hunting is in no way limiting.

Next stop Africa.